THE GRAND EPIC OF SAIVISM

Released by

Thiru. K S Narasimhan, I.A.S.

Commissioner, Hindu Religious Endowments of Tamilnadu

during the

Golden Jubilee Celebrations

of the Society

18-12-1970

THE GRAND EPIC OF SAIVISM

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By
Yogi Suddhananda Bharathi

Foreword By
Dr V A Devasenapathi, MA., PHD.

THE SOUTH INDIA SAIVA SIDDHANTA WORKS
PUBLISHING SOCIETY, TINNEVELLY, LIMITED.
MADRAS-1
1970

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THE SOUTH INDIA SAIVA SIDDHANTA WORKS
PUBLISHING SOCIETY, TINNEVELLY, LTD.

Also at

91, East Car Street, Tirunelveli-6
50-51, West Masi Street, Madurai-1
22/819, Rangai Gowder Street, Coimbatore-1

Ed 1 December 1970

Q23wx1
111N70

THE GRAND EPIC OF SAIVISM

Publication Serial No. 1406

Appar Achakam, Madras-1 (1/2)

தோற்றந் துடியதனில் தோயுந் தீதியமைப்பில்
சாற்றியிடும் அங்கியிலே சங்காரம்—ஊற்றமாய்
ஊன்று மலர்ப்பதத்தே உற்றதிரோ தம்ழத்தி
நான்ற மலர்ப்பதத்தே நாடு.

(படைத்தல். காத்தல். அழித்தல். மறைத்தல். அருளல்:)

LORD SIVA

(The Cosmic Dancer)

Publishers' Note

'The Grand Epic of Saivism' which the society is publishing today is the rendering in English of the great work, popularly known as 'Periya Puranam'. The word 'Peria Puranam', which was a hallowed name has lost, in the modern Tamil, its real meaning and it may suggest to the ordinary reader that it is a myth. But it is really an authentic record of the lives of sixty three noble souls, of different ranks. Their common aim was to serve the God and Godmen. A study of the epic will reveal the thrilling sacrifice and devotion of these Godmen. Sacrifice or Socialism about which there is too much of talk today has reached its zenith during the periods which the epic depicts. God never let down his devotees whenever they were in distress.

It is in the fitness of things that much emphasis has been laid by this society, on Periya Puranam, the Grand Epic of Saivism, on the eve of its Golden Jubilee. The society is also bringing its own edition of Periya Puranam, in Tamil, with short notes. There will also be a symposium on 'Periya Puranam', during the celebrations, in which twelve scholars will participate. The speeches, pre-written, will be released in a book form on the same day. This Epic is not merely a religious work but deals with social ethics. The saints besides their religious life lived upto the social standard laid down in 'Tirukkural'. The sacred Kural' is being gradually accepted as a 'code of conduct', throughout the world. This epic, it is hoped, will attain the same status. The

society ardently hopes that the day will not be far off for the world to recognise its universal appeal. It was Sekkizhar, the minister of the country, who undertook and completed successfully the task of collecting, compiling, collating and composing in verse the lives of the sixty three Nayanmars. It is his *magnum opus*.

The ultimate aim of the society is to get established a separate research cell for 'Periya Puranam'. It takes this opportunity to appeal to the Universities in India and the Governments at the States and the Centre to consider the possibilities of opening similar research centres. The UNESCO will not be out of its ambit if it participates in this noble endeavour. An earnest appeal is made to them by this society.

Yogi Shuddhananda Bharati, multi-lingual scholar, versatile genius, great spiritualist, great poet and author of many books has done signal service in rendering this great work into English. Words are not suffice to thank him for this noble undertaking and wonderful achievement in his task. His role in the current renaissance of Saivism is considerably significant and we pray to the Almighty to bestow upon him a long and healthy life to continue him to be an apostle of Saivism. He has also consented to be the Visiting Professor to any University to help and advise the researches into 'Periya Puranam'.

We also wish to express our sincere thanks to Dr. V. A. Devasenapathy, Professor of Philosophy, University of Madras, for his scholarly foreword. He has, in his foreword, distilled the essence of 'Periyapuranam' in short, sweet and pithy words: "Completely rooting out all sense of 'I' and 'mine', they (devotees) considered themselves and all they had

as the property of God and His saints. They were the possessed-He and His devotees their possessor".

Our sincere thanks are also due to the great scholar Rao Saheb, K. Kothandapani Pillai, who tried his best by his suggestions to make the English rendering a success.

Last but not the least, our humble salutations are to Lord Siva, the cosmic dancer, for making our hearts move into this venture and making it a success.

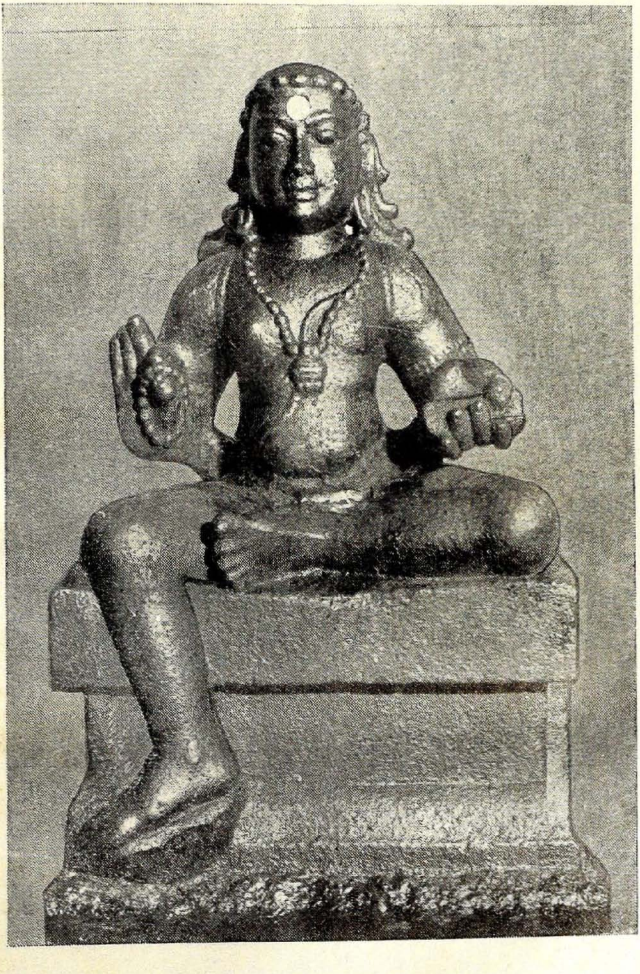
Thiru N. R. Murugavel, M.A., M.O.L., has prepared a glossary of important words and the same has been appended to this book. Our thanks are also due to him.

Contents

		Page
	Foreword	iii
	The Author's Introduction	vii
	Siva and Saivism	1
1.	Priests of Tillai	10
2.	Tirunilakanta Nayanar	12
3.	Iyarpakai Nayanar	16
4.	Mara Nayanar	22
5.	Meiporul Nayanar	25
6.	Viranminda Nayanar	27
7.	Amarnithi Nayanar	29
8.	Eripaththa Nayanar	32
9.	Enathinatha Nayanar	36
10.	Kannappa Nayanar	38
11.	Kalaya Nayanar	45
12.	Manakkanchara Nayanar	49
13.	Arival Taya Nayanar	52
14.	Aanaya Nayanar	54
15.	Murti Nayanar	57
16.	Muruga Nayanar	61
17.	Rudra Pasupathi Nayanar	63
18.	St. Nandanar	64
19.	Tiru-Kurippu-Thonda Nayanar	68
20.	Chandesa Nayanar	72
21.	Appar the Dynamic Saint	76

		Page
22.	Kulachirai Nayanar	112
23.	Kurumba Nayanar	114
24.	Karaikal Ammaiyar	116
25.	Appudi Adigal	123
26.	Tiru Nila Nakka Nayanar	126
27.	Naminandi Adigal	128
28.	St. Tirujnana Sambandar	130
29.	Kalikama Nayanar	154
30.	Tirumula Nayanar	155
31.	Dandi Adigal	159
32.	Murkha Nayanar	162
33.	Somasimara Nayanar	164
34.	Sakkia Nayanar	165
35.	Sirappuli Nayanar	167
36.	Siruthonda Nayanar	168
37.	Cheraman Perumal (Kazharitrarivar)	176
38.	Gananatha Nayanar	180
39.	Kutruva Nayanar	181
40.	Poi Adimai Illada Pulavar	182
41.	Pugal Chola Nayanar	183
42.	Narasinga Munaia Nayanar	185
43.	Adi Patta Nayanar	186
44.	Kalikamba Nayanar	187
45.	Kalia Nayanar	188
46.	Shakti Nayanar	189
47.	Iyadigal Kadavarkone	190
48.	Kanampulla Nayanar	191
49.	Kari Nayanar	192

		Page
50.	Nintra Seer Nedumara Nayanar	193
51.	Voyilar Nayanar	194
52.	Munaiaduvar	196
53.	Kazhar Chinga Nayanar	197
54.	Idankazhi Nayanar	198
55.	Seruthunai Nayanar	199
56.	Pugazh Tunai Nayanar	200
57.	Kotpuli Nayanar	201
58.	Loving Servitors	203
59.	They Sing The Supreme	204
60.	Siva-Minded Sages	205
61.	Those Born at Arur	206
62.	Thrice-Worshippers	207
63.	Saints wear Holy Ashes	208
64.	Salutations to All Devotees	209
65.	Pusalar Nayanar	210
66.	Mangaiyarkarasi	212
67.	Nesa Nayanar	214
68.	Kochengan Cholan	215
69.	Nilakanta Yalpanar	217
70.	Sadaya Nayanar	219
71.	Isai Jnaniyar	220
72.	Alala Sundarar	221
73.	The Glory of Arur	224
	Appendix	249



DIVINE POET
SEKKIZHAR
(Author of Periya Puranam)

Foreword

'The glory of the devotees of the Lord knows no limits. Their number knows no limits. Yet impelled by limitless desire, I shall speak of them,' says Sekkizhar in an introductory verse to his *Tiruthondarpuranam*, popularly known as the *Periapuranam*. The theme being a great one viz., the lives of the devotees, the readers will correspondingly understand its spirit. The deeper they enter into the spirit of it, the greater will be their understanding of its significance. With this expectation Sekkizhar proceeds with his narrative.

Who are the devotees? What are their characteristics? Sekkizhar gives a brief general sketch under the heading *Tirukkuttachchirappu* (The excellence of the Sacred Company). Called by the Lord to His service there were those whose body and mind were suffused with love and Trembling, those who did manual labour (for the Lord and His devotees) and countless others besides. The sacred ashes they wore, were white, reflecting the purity of their character. Even if the elements went contrary to their nature, these devotees never wavered in their adherence to the flowery feet of their Lord. They pursued the path of steadfast love to the Lord. They were persons of lofty, blameless character. Their wealth, being spiritual, was beyond the vicissitudes of gain and loss. They treated alike a piece of gold and a potsherd. Worshipping the Lord in love that welled forth in them, they had the spiritual strength

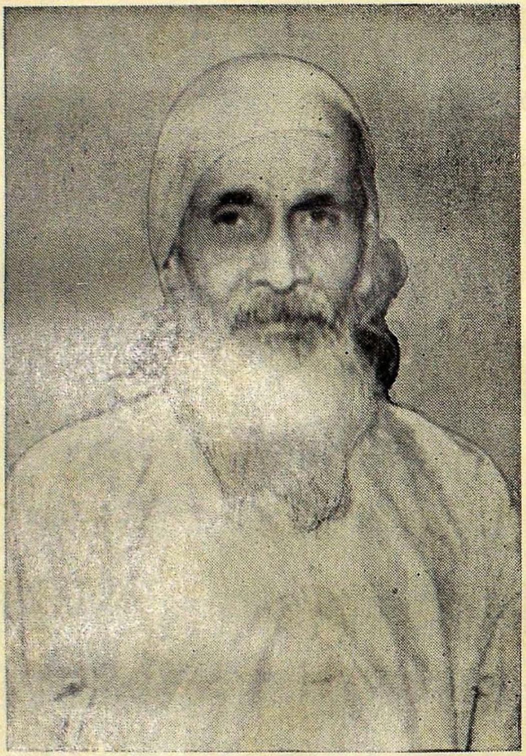
not to care even for release. Their ornament was the sacred bead, their dress was a simple piece of cloth. Their concern was nothing other than service to their Lord. Their love was unquenchable. Wants they had none.

The devotees having these characteristics were of both sexes, of all castes and professions, of all age groups, of great learning or none at all. Yet what bound them together was their total devotion to the Lord and His saints. They allowed nothing to come between them and their total devotion. Completely rooting out all sense of 'I' and 'mine', they considered themselves and all they had as the property of God and His saints. They were the possessed—He and His devotees their possessor. Actuated by such a spirit of dedication, they did mighty things for the Lord, as well as apparently trifling and common place things. Here again it was not *what* they did, but *how* they did that mattered. In plain narrative in prose, especially in translation into a foreign language, some of the accounts might appear crude and shocking. But such is not the impression if one goes through Sekkizhar's *Periapuranam*. He makes us feel the greatness of the devotees not only by his literary genius but also by his spiritual rapport with that glorious band. It is worthwhile recalling that there is specific mention of this glorious band as including others not mentioned in the narrative, 'the devotees beyond—who are at the Feet of the Lord'—beyond the geographical limits of Tamilnadu and beyond the time span of the narrative—in brief, the devotees of all countries and of all times. There is thus a spiritual confederation with retrospective and prospective membership open to all devotees.

Anyone going through the Periapuranam is bound to feel a strong desire to make this treasure-trove available to non-Tamils. But who could muster courage to translate it, especially into a non-Indian language? There is such a thing as the genius of a language. The translator must be proficient in the language of the original and that into which it is rendered. Above all, in regard to a religious classic like the Periapuranam, the translator must be a person of spiritual attainments as well. It is to the credit of Mr. V. Subbiah Pillai, the Managing Director of South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society that he has been able to persuade Kavi Yogi Maharishi Suddhananda Bharati to give us an English version of the *Periapuranam.* Those who have enjoyed the writings of the Maharishi in Tamil know that he is a poet of a high order, and that his compositions bear the stamp of his life-long sadhana and attainments. He has sought to capture the spirit of the Periapuranam in his English version. May this work find an ever-widening circle of readers!

Professor of Philosophy
University of Madras,
Madras-5

V. A. Devasenapathi



YOGI SHUDDANANDA BHARATI

The Author's Introduction

A UNIVERSAL SCRIPTURE

1. A Vast Question

Since the dawn of history, there is a mystery behind human life. There is an insight behind the eyesight. That ethereal vault above, seems a vast question mark, demanding this fair earth below, "who am I and who are you?" Between 'That and This', between 'I and you', the Truth of our being struggles for an expression.

The twinkling stellar beauty, walks with the assemblage to the rythm of a mystic Aum. Two milllion light years stand between one assemblage and the other and yet how they keep time to the mystic rhythm of their ages of arrayed march! Who has set on march these stars in the car of Time? The tossing billows play like laughing children bubbling with moon-kissed ecstasy. What is the secret of their delight? The sun from above paints the earth green and gold, with the touch of its colourful rays. The fair fertile world is a feast for the eye and the heart.

2. Human Brain

But does man enjoy this poem of beauty and harmony in Nature? Does he taste the sweet fountain of Existence. No, like Tantalus in dark Tartarus, his eager hopes are disappointed. Like Thomson's Hound

of Heaven, he is hounded by the eternal question of who, what, wherefore and why am I? The imperfect human brain caught in this conundrum, builds mystic labelled creeds.

3. Philosophy Develops

Man has developed round this question Ontology to probe into the Science of Pure Being, Metaphysics to enquire into the ultimate nature of beings. Cosmology which explains what the universe is, Epistomolgy which treats on the finale of things and Teleology which tells us about the final cause of things. Man comes to the conclusion that the flux of things and beings begin from God and end in Him. There are, on the other hand, Hylozoistics who maintain that there is no God but matter and the universe. The Utilitarian philosophy tries to confer good for all. The Ionian and the Hebrew philosophies maintain that all things flow from the Original Divine Fire. The Divine Fire that burst out before Moses, voiced out a Truth—"I am as I am—I am that I am". Jesus says, "He that has seen me has seen the father. I am in the father and the father is in me."

But through all these ramified ideologies, man is yet to find a pivotal factor which accords unity of faiths and oneness of God in a broad Spiritual Integration.

4. Saivism, the Solution

Saint Tirumular comes to our rescue maintaining "GOD IS UNIQUE, MANKIND IS ONE IN HIM" Tirumular maintains the Tiuth. "He is the fire, the sky, the wind, the water, and the earth. He is everywhere,

everything. He is the Life of lives, He is Siva in the jiva. He is in the heart that feels him. Like sweetness in honey, He is in the Soul. Adore Him! love Him, serve Him in all-for all are moving temples of God." Saivism is thus the solution that solves cosmic riddles.

This ultimate realisation of Sages and Prophets is the heart of Saivism which is the synthetic religion *par excellence.* It considers all souls as one in God. The God lover surrenders to Him declaring 'Aum Nama Sivaya. He meditates on Him in his heart with the mantra Sivoham (what is in I is Siva) He sees Him everywhere with the Mantra Sivamayam, every thing is pervaded by Siva. Saivism considers universe as His Temple, the collective soul as His form, Love as religion and service to fellow beings as worship. The joy of seeing all happy is the bliss of existence.

5. Socretes to Kant

Socretes started the fundamental question, "Who are you?" Plato probed into the question and found out the Divine Essence of life and declared, "To be as good as God is the *summum bonum* of life. God and the highest Good are one." The touch stone of western intellectualism is Kant's thought of "The Thing That is".

6. His will Acts

Manicca Vachakar sat in silent seclusion and enquired within himself, "Who am I, what am I, what is this Heart, what is wisdom, who cognises me?" He arrived at the great answer, "God is—every thing is, for God is—God the unique one unto Him I gave what

I am and have. He has possessed me and His will acts in me."

All contraries are reconciled in this absolute Truth, "You, I and All are one in the unique One-God."

7. Four Steps

Saivism prescribes four Sadhanas or practices for the God-ward elan of the human soul caught in the meshes of mental modifications.

(1) *Charya*—moral purity (2) *Kirya* prayer, worship and holy service (3) *Yoga*, inner communion and meditation and (4) *Jnana* Self knowledge and identification. These lead the Soul step by step to the bliss of Siva. The pure soul glows with the Divine Light, like a gem in the jewel, heat in the red-hot iron, salt in the ocean and scent in the flower.

The four steps are exemplified in Appar, Sambandar, Sundarar and Manicca Vachakar. The Divine grace descended into these souls of spiritual fervour and enabled them to love God in the heart and serve humanity in the world.

8. Cosmic Vision

Appar had the cosmic vision of Siva and Shakti, God and His conscious energy, everywhere like fire in the wood, like ghee in the milk, like spark in the gem. Appar realised Siva in the Jiva and the Grace of Siva acted through him for the good of humanity.

It is the Grace that brought victory to the evangel of St. Sambandar. He sang, "Beings can live amicably

in the world doing good. They can attain what they aspire for, only if they live like Siva and Shakti united in the soul, only if they utter the mantra 'Nama Sivaya' with melting fervour and moving love.

9. Surrender

Sundarar says, "To Thee I surrender; Thy will I follow. Even if I forget, my tongue is hibituated to utter Thy mantra Nama Sivaya." Manicca Vachakar says, "Tapas! Did I do any thing of that sort? God made me mutter the mantra *Sivaya Namaha.* As I uttered this mantra with utter surrender, Siva entered my heart and I feel Him there always and I am conscious of His Grace that acts through my instrume-tality." This is the essence of Saivism exemplified by the sixty three Nayanmars whose history is a Saga of sincere love and sacred sacrifice.

10. Dante's Grace Light

Sekkizhar was the blessed sage that wove into a rich epic of Godmen, the life and sacrifice of these souls of grace light. Dante who lived a century after Sekkizhar breathed the same ideal when he addressed Beatrice, before the entrance of Paradise. "Through dark inferno and burning purgatory, I passed. The Divine Grace led me to the dawn of splendid Light, O, beatific smile of Grace-Light. Gracious Light, lead me on; I follow Thee. My pure heart sees thy immaculate beauty, O, Angel." Grace Light is the guiding force of the dedicated life of the sixty three Nayanmars sung by the inspired muse of St. Sekkizhar.

11. Creative Poet

Sekkizhar is a creative poet. Poetry is a great formative power, a vision of the inner Reality embodied in a spontaneous flow of rhythmic expression. It is a garden of the beautiful breathing the aroma of the Supreme. It is a fountain of the Spirit flowing with the honey of Divine bliss cherishing the field of harmonised existence. Such is the poetic genius of St. Sekkizhar, a self revelatory rhythm of the Real, high in emotion, deep in thought, far in vision, wide in movement and dynamic in effect.

Sekkizhar is not a mere composer. His lines are not mere array of words set to metrical beat. It is not a Jhonsonian Jingle. It is a singer's harp, not a juggler's drum. Sekkizhar is a Seer-poet, a messenger of Truth-light, a mediator between Soul and Siva. His song falls from the Soul's communion with Siva, the Supreme. His poetic ecstasy opens human eyes to the wonderful vision of the Divine in man.

12. Periapuranam

Sekkizhar's Periapuranam sung between 1113 and 1150 A.D. is the *magnum opus* of revelatory epics. He is a master-hagiographer, and his Periapuranam is a master piece of world's sacred literature. It is a world book of holy Saints. It had the wonderful effect of checking alien inroads upon our pristine religion and giving an impetus to Saivism which is a universal religion. It has the virtue of bringing together varieties of devoted souls on the same platform. Love of Siva and service of His Saints and devotees at any cost—these are the life-breath of Sainthood, embalmed in Sekkizhar's Epic of Saivism.

It brings before us the tragi-comic drama of human existence and shows how to edify and sublimise it by the Divine Grace. Life begins with the Hamelton pessimism of "to be or not be" but ends with the halcyon optimism of to be an eternal instrument of God's Grace enjoying untramelled peace and bliss. Periapuranam solves the riddle of existence and brings salvation by sincere egoless dedication of life to the love and service of God.

13. Siva's Grace Plays.

The Infinite Siva, created this world for the play of His Pure Grace (Shuddha Shakti). The play of Grace is promoted towards the liquidation of ignorance and impurities that hold the souls in bondage. Saivism calls humanity collectively to be conscious of the Divine, dancing in every heart and live a life of faith and surrender to That omnipotent Reality. The Divine Grace rescues faithful souls from the labyrinth of infernal miseries. It leads the evolution of the soul by a process of inner transformati on to Sivahood.

14. Collective Life In God

The transformed Soul lives in a heaven of peace and bliss where woes of vital passions cease, where God alone is the king of beings, where beings are one body in God, where life is an afflorescence of Divine Grace, where *spiritual socialism* unites all in inner communion with the unique one. It transcends the barriers and frontiers of caste, creed, race and nationality and unites in its ecstatic rhapsody, Nanda the Harijan, Kannappar the hunter, Paanar the lutist, Ayanar the flutist, Iyarpakai the merchant, Mara the agriculturist,

Enathi the swordsman, Kurippu the washerman, Dandi the digger, Kaliyan the oil-man, Kotpuli the warrior, Adipatha the fisherman, Murkha the gambler, Sakya the peltar, Nilkanta the potter, Nedumaran the king, Kulachirai the premier, Mangayarkarasi the queen, Siruthondar the hero-saint, Appar the Vellala, Sambandar the Andanar, Sundarar the Adi Saiva, Cheraman the Royal Saint - all these devotees are held in equal respect and God is adored above all. Saivism does not build any personality cult, any religion round personalities and their miracles. "The galaxy of Nayanamars consists of 4 Adi Saivas, 13 Marayore, 6 Kings, 5 Chieftains, 5 Merchants, 13 Vellalas, 2 Shepherds, 1 Potter, 1 Fisherman, 1 Hunter, 1 Nadar, 1 Weaver, 1 Oilman, 1 Washerman, 1 Harijan, and 6 Saints of unknown rank, Thirty among these adored Sivalingam, twelve adored the Guru, and nineteen served God-lovers. All are equal and all are honoured irrespective of their birth and pedigree.

15. Their Times

These Nayanmars lived between A.D. 400 and 865. A.D. 825 was the year when Cheraman Perumal left for Mt. Kailas along with St. Sundarar. Appar lived 81 years, Sambandar 16, (A.D. 640-656), Sundarar 18 years. Appar lived during the time of two Pallava kings- Mahendara Varman and Narasimha Varman.

Appar and Sambandar lived between (A.D. 580-656). Appar has sung in 128 temples and Sambandar in 219 temples. There have been more than 300 Siva temples during their time. It is their wonderful songs that lit the lamp of glory in those temples and kept them burning

forever. Sundar lived during the time of Nandi Varman (A.D. 840-865).

16. Hay-day of Saivism

Appar and Sambandar did all the spade work and established Saivism on a strong foundation quelling by the Divine Grace, all the opposing forces. Saivism flourished with added momentum and Sundarar had a smooth way though the spiritual concord that prevailed in the land. The hay-day of Saivism began with the victory of Jnanasambanda in Madurai. The Chera, Chola, Pandya, and Pallava kingdoms patronised Saivism and beautiful temples were built in which were installed the images of Nayanmars. There was unity of consciousness. Nambiandar Nambi rose up 150 years after Sundarar with his *Andadi* recounting the glorious deeds of the sixty three Nayanmars adored by Sundarar in his famous song.

The spiritual fervour and service-ardour of the Nayanmars touched the heart of the nation and kindled flames of love and devotion. The Thevaram hymns were sung with moving fervour. Even the Saiva-Vaishnava dichotomy was cemented by the spiritual solidarity established by a sense of national heritage. Nataraja and Govindaraja were adored in the same temple.

18. Advent of Sekkizhar

The advent of Sekkizhar was a crowning victory to Saivism, It was a splendid fulfilment of the vision of Nayanmars. The evolutionary steps of Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar reached a revolutionary consummation in awakening the spirit of the Nayanmars

in the heart of Saivites. People wondered at the bold sacrifice of Nayanmars in the service of devotees.

19. Sacrifice, Sacrifice!

O, what a sacrifice! Can any one give his charming wife to a guest? St. Iyarpakai did that? Can sacrifice go beyond the terrible extent of slicing one's dear son to prepare dish for a hungry monk for, he demanded only the tender flesh of a child? Yes, it was Chirutondar who did it boldly and cooly. Can any host dare the dark raining midnight into fields, to gather the paddy just sown, to cook food for a hungry sage? Mara-Nayanar did that. Can any one give the beautiful ringlets of his dear daughter just before her wedding day to a sage who wanted it? Manakkan Chara Nayanar, an army commander cut the hair of her fair daughter and gave it to the sage. Can any one offer his eyes to a bleeding Lingam? The hunter-devotee Kannappan did that. Can any saint undergo unscathed the terrible ordeals of being slaked in a lime kiln, poisoned and thrown into the sea tied to a stone? St. Tiru Navukarasar met those ordeals and proved the protective power of Siva's Grace.

"He is father, mother, brother—He who has created the three worlds—He is the unseen Protector behind my dedicated life—Mine is to sing and serve. The rest depends upon His Will" sings Appar. But all these ordeals were only tests of their faith and God saved them for His service.

22. Stream of Songs

These mystic Saints attained direct communion with Siva in the Jiva by a deep spiritual insight. They

sang to the world in melodious tunes their secret and sacred inner experiences and bequeathed to us rich treasures of divine wisdom. Their life was a stream of songs flowing towards the Infinite along the banks of faith and fervour.

21. Mystic-Saviours

All world's religions were saved by such mystics of divine intuition. We have a galaxy of mystics in Christendom. Behold St. Francis of Assisi and his franciscan frairs who embraced purity and poverty. A semi-ragged mendicant, the forlorn Francis preached to wood-land birds; he picked up stone by stone and built his church. He perspired the blood of crucifixion. His simple life and innocent heart restored spiritual vitality to the faith of Jesus Christ. Behold St. Catherine who resisted with her soul-force the tyranny of king Maximinence. She was tortured, whipped, starved, incarcerated and at last stabbed ; yet she kept the fire of faith ablaze and thousands were illumined by that faith.

Behold St. Benedict praying in a solitary cave in the sancutum of the heart's temple. His devotional fervour attracted seekers. Friends hailed him and foes cursed him. Enemies gave him poisoned water. Benedict meditated upon Jesus on the cross. The poison-cup broke to pieces. He shunned popularity and lived with some sincere seekers embracing purity, humility and poverty. He earned by work and gave to the poor freely, His soul burst out to mingle with God as he was praying in the sanctum of a church.

Behold St. Agatha. and Sesilia who were tortured to death by heathen kings and yet gave their life joyfully

for their faith in Jesus. Behold St. Therasa, the wonderful saintess who invited leprosy into her body so that her sex beauty may not attract the passionate king who tried to molest her chaste virtue.

22. St. Kuba

Ransacking the story of North Indian Saints, we come across St. Kuba who dedicated all his life with his wife Puri to sing the glory of God. He was a potter like Tiru Nilakanta. From his poor income he fed Sadhus. One day two hundred Sadhus entered his poor home with hunger. Kuba ran to a provision merchant who wanted him to dig a well in return for the supply of rice and pulse. Kuba agreed. After feeding the Sadhus and revelling in holy concerts, Kuba and his wife came with spade and crowbar and began digging a well. The well was dug deep but suddenly the earth crashed and Kuba was buried alive. Non-believers laughed and derided at Kuba's devotion to God saying "If God is, if God helps his lover—let Him save Kuba first" One day a set of monks camped near the well and they heard "Ramnam" from its depth. Next day these monks with the help of some men of faith removed the earth and Kuba rose from the depth singing with ecstasy "Earth did not bury me; Ram embraced me" His fervour created faith in thousands. We remember Thandi Nayanar when we hear 'Kuba's story.

23. More Faith

Faith is tested to create faith and love like gold gets brighter as it undergoes ordeal of the fire! In the temple, God Souls dedicated to God stand equalminded,

equalvisioned. Those who talk of ranks are cranks before the Supreme who is one for all and one in all. "Be constant in prayer and give arms" say Alquoran and the Nayanmars did so. God was so intimate with St. Sundarar that he solved even the connubial riddle of that princely Saint.

24. A World Scripture

Tirukkural occupies a high rank among scriptures that can claim versatility and universality. Periapuranam Saints lived the moral truths of Tirukkural. They took refuge at the feet of God and served humanity with a feeling heart. Dedicated submission to the Supreme will and duty-conscious service and utmost sacrifice characterised them. Witness how king Anabaya drove over his prince's body the same chariot which crushed a calf. Witness how the Himalayan Sage entered the dead body of the shephered Mulan to assuage the grievance of the cows that he tended so fondly. The sage in the body of the shepherd became St, Tirumular and gave the world the epoch making book Tirumantiram.

"The heart is the temple—Soul is Siva-lingam" says St. Mular.

25. Temple-Culture

Temple is the heart of Saivism. Temple is a sanctum of vibrating peace. We feel exalted in the holy atmosphere of a temple. Every religion has its temple-call it Church, Mosque, Mandir, Shrine or Synagogue or Stupa. It is a place for peace, prayer and meditation. We call it Alayam-a sanctum where the soul ingathered merges in God-consciousness. It is called *Koil* in Tamil

meaning God's Home. It is a sacred place where the Divine Presence is imminent. Temple comes from *Templum* which is a latin word for the House of God. The Veda says "Body is a temple and Soul the image of God and meditation is worship." Appar says "Tinker's heart is Temple." Voyilar and Pusalar built a psychic temple within them and God entered it first and next the stone-temple of the king. Saivism is indeed a Temple-religion. Temples are power-houses of Siva-Shakti. The 36 Tatvas or Reals in our body are contained in the form of the Temple and also the seven planes of consciousness (vide Secrets of Yoga)

26. Godheads

The names and forms of our Gods have inner esoteric meanings. Ganesa is Aum, Skanda is Siva's gnostic fire, Shakti is God's consciousness. Nataraja is the God of Cosmic play. The sound of his drum creates, the fire in one hand destroys sins; the raised palm protects. The other hand points to the raised feet which shelters devotees under its benign shadow. The other leg crushes the evil force. Vishnu is the omnipresent Lord who protects creatures. Each God has a Shakti, a manifesting force. Saraswati is the manifesting force of Brahma, Laxmi of Narayana, Kali of Siva, Maheswari of Maheswara, Manonmani of Sadasiva, Shuddha Shakti of the pure Paramatman.

The inspired artists and seer poets of our land have given beautiful forms to these Godheads and Sages have given mantras and hymns for their worship. Temples are spiritual universities for the spontaneous education of the masses and classes in God-awareness. Temples are dynamic centres of art, beauty, poetry,

spiritual knowledge and yogic wisdom. The temple tower calls us saying "Come, God is present here". The flag-post symbolises the Meru Dandam or Spinal region with mystic nerves. The Balipitam calls us to sacrifice ego and meditate calmly like Nandi (Bull) facing the Sanctum. The curtain in the Sanctum is the maya that hides the Divine from our view. It is removed when the Light is waved before the Divine image inside. The temple is a symbol of yogic realisation. After adoring all deities we come to Dakshinamurti, the silent God. Worship begins with chanting and bowing and ends with silent ingathered meditation.

27. All over the world

The hymns of Nayanmars were sung in temples. Their services were dedicated to temples. Periapuranam was sung in the spacious Hall of the Chidambaram temple.

God inspired Sekkizhar with the word "*All over the world*" and the poet gave us a work worth reading all over the world. The beginning, middle and the end of Periapuranam is "All over the world". It is a universal book and the whole world shall study it now.

29. Aspiration fulfilled

I adore always Nataraja in my heart. His Grace leads my life. He is my unique Master. Tirumular is my Yogic Guide. Appar is my favourite Saint. Sekkizhar is my favourite poet. I took pleasure in listening and reading this Grand Epic of Saivism since my boyhood. I had the delight of reading the book

with Pandit Nattar, Pazhniappar, Maraimalai Adigal and Tiru-vi-ka. I have rendered into English many Thevarams. I have spoken and written in extenso the glory of our Saints and Godmen here and abroad. But the inner spirit was long contemplating over revealing the magnanimity of Saints of Saivism glorified by St. Sekkizhar to the English world at large.

Padmasri V. Subbiah Pillai the indefatigable director of Saiva Siddhanta Kazhakam spurred me to action. He came to me very often and brought to me Tiru Kodandapani Pillai, retired official and scholar. Steeped in Mahaturiya Samadhi, I invoked Lord Nataraja and opened Sekkizhar's *magnam opus.* The Lord moved my heart, the heart moved the pen and I wrote every night and gave the pages to the Siva Thiru Subbiah Pillai in the morning. He had my manuscript typed and the Savant Kodandapani Pillai scrutinised the manuscripts and gave his suggestions. Tiru R. Kalyana Sundaram of the Publishing Society corrected the proofs with care and diligence. Professor Dr. V. A. Devasenapati the able editor of Siddhanta and the Dean of Philosophy University of Madras was kind enough to give his worthy foreword.

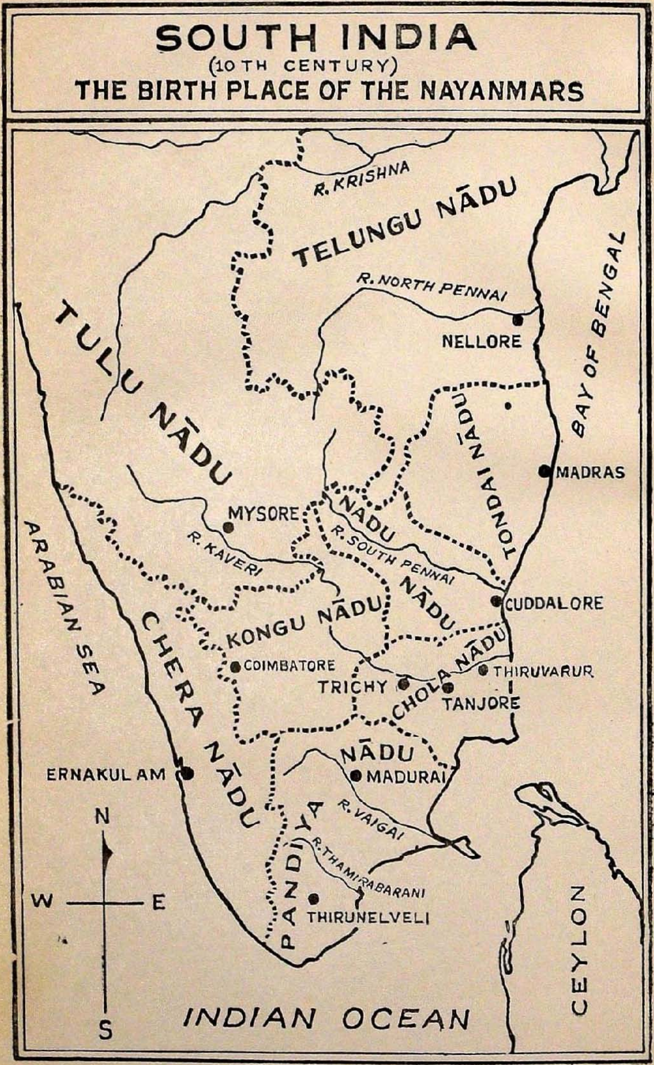
Now, the Great Epic of Saivism is before you, dear readers, dear devotees of God and His Saints. A great work is before mankind. Let this Epic of Saivism inspire all to live a perfect life in tune with the Divine will and attain the *summun bonum* of human life evolving into Life Divine.

Blessed are they that recognise the infinite Divine; for theirs is the glory of existence! Blessed are they that love and love; for theirs is the Grace

of the Divine! Blessed are they that have the Grace of the Divine; for theirs is victory in life! Blessed are they that embrace the Divine; for theirs is the cosmic energy which works wonders! Blessed are they that remember the Divine; for theirs is peace and plenty! Blessed are they that live for the Divine; for the Divine shall live in them! Blessed are they that serve the Divine; for the Divine shall give them strength! Blessed are they that pour themselves into surrender; for the Divine shall pour himself into them and transform their life into a poem of divinity! Blessed are they that give themselves to the Divine; for the Divine shall give Himself to them!

'Yoga Samaj',
Adyar,
Madras-20.
1—12—70

Yogi Suddhananda Bharati


SOUTH INDIA
(10TH CENTURY)
THE BIRTH PLACE OF THE NAYANMARS
R. KRISHNA
TELUNGU NĀDU
R. NORTH PENNAI
NELLORE
BAY OF BENGAL
TULU NĀDU
TONDAI NĀDU
MADRAS
NADU
NADU
MYSORE
R. KAVERI
R. SOUTH PENNAI
NĀDU
CUDDALORE
ARABIAN SEA
KONGU NĀDU
CHERA NĀDU
COIMBATORE
CHOLA NĀDU
THIRUVARUR
TRICHY
TANJORE
NĀDU
ERNAKULAM
MADURAI
PANDIYA
R. VAIGAI
R. THAMIRABARANI
THIRUNELVELI
N
W
E
S
CEYLON
INDIAN OCEAN

THE GRAND EPIC OF SAIVISM

Siva and Saivism

The Most Ancient Faith

Siva and Saivism can claim an antiquity going beyond the dawn of history and further still when Nature's energy burst into subtle elements. St. Manikkavachakar sings: "How can my words hail Thee, O Lord! Thou art heaven and earth, air and light. Thou playest as life-breath in bodies. Thou art the Lord of creation leading the I-and-mine-play of endless existence. Thou art existence and non-existence. How can words mouth Thy glory!" Saivism is a Gospel of Perfect Life in tune with the Divine Will. It leads the evolution of the human Soul to transcendent heights of Peace and Bliss. Tirumular, the Master Yogin declares: "Siva and Love are synonimous. Breathe in Siva's name; it absolves sins and evils and transforms the soul". Saivism is not a personality cult. It is not built round limited personalities who come and go playing their span of life on the mundane stage. It is a natural trend of living in God-Consciousness. It plays life in full harmony and it is far from life-shunning escapism.

Mr. John Marshall observes that the remarkable revelation of Mohenjadaro excavation holds Saivism as the most ancient Faith of the world. It dominates

India from Gujarat to Nepal, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. It expands beyond our frontiers to Trans-Himalayan and oversea lands.

Saiva Siddhanta

The Philosophy of Saivism is Saiva Siddhanta. It commands the admiration of savants like Rev. Gowdie who maintains "Saiva Siddhanta represents the high-water-mark of Indian thought and Indian feeling". It is a synthesis of all that is best in the thought currents, ancient and modern, East and West and it appeals to spiritual and practical idealists; it forges a golden link between science and psyche. It dominates our literature and ritual, our sacred lore and serene temple-worship. It is a robust philosophy of plural realisations and multi enjoyments of the play of God in man's destiny. It is based upon the truth of triple entities of God, Soul and the Universe. It lags behind no modern philosophy which talks of Thing-in-Itself, monad, evolution, transformation and elan vital. It is not a speculative philosophy but a philosophy of Practical Idealism that holds a balance between the extremes of ascetic bareness and pragmatic denial. It brings into its vast synthesis the ethical, moral, spiritual and the dynamic aspects of life vibrating with the Divine spirit.

Sublimates Life

It promotes the fullness of objective life in subjective peace and freedom. St. Sambandar maintains that the purity of life in Siva Consciousness, can enable one to live in peace and blissful plenty. Siddhanta leads the human destiny from gloomy bondage, to glorious freedom in Divine consciousness. It raises man from the power-

pelf-pleasure-oriented ruts, to a crowning life of purity, unity and divinity. It sublimates life in body, mind, world and its enjoyments (Danu, Karana, Bhuvana and Bhogam), and leads it through the flights of psychic planes to the heights of Truth-Knowledge Bliss (Sat Chit Ananda), by a process of Charya (moral purity), Kriya (God-Worship), Yoga (Inner Communion) and Jnana (God Knowledge). A true Siddhantin regains the spiritual paradise lost by vital desires. His sincere love and surrender lead him from sacrifice to sacrifice, until nothing is left in him except Siva's Grace into which his limited soul is merged.

The sixty-three Nayanmars sung by Sekkizhar in his Peria Puranam, the *magnum opus* of Saivism, shine before us as the guiding lights of this Siddhantic Realisation.

Saints are Exemplars

Every religion has a galaxy of Saints who are exemplars of its faith and creed. They are lamps of Spiritual Radiance removing the mental gloom of humanity. They are gracious healers of humanity and martyrs at the altar of Love and Truth. The Sun lights the world from above and Saints enlighten the living world from below. The lives of pure Saints form the golden pages of the History of Mankind. Vedic Rishis, Vasishta, Valmiki, Buddha, Zoaraster, Leo-T-se, Moses, Jesus, Rasul, Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya, Ramanuja, Madhava, Sankara, St. Francis, Ramakrishna, Ramana and Aurobindo are well known to the world at large.

Saiva Siddhanta has given to the world wonderful Saints who have done miraculous benefactions to man-

kind, by pouring their soul's fervour into hymns that have their fountain in the dizzy height of His.

Magnum Opus of Saivism

Such are the Saints sung by Sekkizhar in his immortal work Periya Puranam - the *magnum opus* of hagiography. The Canonical works of Sundarar, Appar and Jnanasambandar, especially the Tiruthonda Tokai of Sundarar and Tiru-thondar Tiru Andadi of Nambiandar Nambi are its source books. They are hymns of obeisance to all the sixty-three canonised Saiva Saints called Nayanmars. Periya Puranam proves through the life of sixty-three Saints, the Truth contained in the eleven Tirumurais which embalm the heart and devotional fervour of Sambandar, Appar, Sundarar, Ammaiyar, Manikkavachakar, Tirumular and others. For so many decades, this soul-thrilling Hymn-treasure was hidden in the limbo of oblivion. Nambi-Andar Nambi and the great Emperor Raja Raja Chola-I, brought them to light. Nambi dedicated his life in assorting and compiling them. But the Time Spirit was waiting for a prodigy who could sing in thrilling verses the lives of all the sixty-three Saints who were the living exemplars of Saiva Siddhanta. God sent that prodigy, Sekkizhar, to elucidate the Truth of Saivism, through the life examples of sixty-three Saints.

Seer Poet Sekkizhar

Sekkizhar is the family name of Arul-mozhi-Thevar. He was born in the fertile village of Kundrathur near Madras. He hailed from the Sekkizhar Section of Vellalars who are a highly cultured community of Tamilnadu. Sekkizhar was a child of precocious

genius. He was well versed in the standard works especially in Saiva Sastras. Anabaya or Kulottunga Chola (1064-1115 A. D.) chose him as his prime minister. He won the good graces of the king by his excellent services to the country. He was bestowed the title of Uttama Chola Pallava Royar (His Excellency the Supreme Royal Premier of the Cholas). But like Manikkavachakar his heart aspired for a greater Spiritual Service to mankind.

The King's Request

Anabaya Chola was a scholar enamoured of Jivaka Chintamani, whose literary beauty captivated him. It is an epic of the Jain faith. Sekkizhar wanted to turn the king's mind towards his traditional religion, Saivism. He told him of the wonderful life of Divine love of the Nayanmars mentioned in the Tiruththonda Thokai of St. Sundarar, far more beneficial to mankind than the life of Jivaka of the Jain epic. This created a new enthusiasm in the king and he requested his premier Sekkizhar, to put into mellifluous verses the lives and teachings of the sixty-three Saiva Saints.

A Great Work

Sekkizhar took refuge at the feet of Nataraja in the Chidambaram Temple and dedicated his days in delving into the hymnal treasures of inspired Saiva Saints and in him the Lord breathed the first word "Ulakelam" - all the Universe. With this word as the first in his work, the poet's stylus raced through the palmyra leaves and a great work was given to humanity.

Dedication

This work in seventy cantos and 4,286 stanzas was called Thiru Thondar Puranam - or Periya Puranam - the great account of the servants of God. A grand festival was held at Chidambaram to release the work. On a decorated seat in the Golden Hall of Nataraja (Ponnambalam), the great work was placed roled in silk and was dedicated to the Lord with religious services and prayers. The inspired Poet expounded this Periya Puranam for one year-April to April-from the thousand pillar hall of the temple.

Sages and Saints hailed the work as the twelfth Holy Book (Tirumurai XII). Sekkizhar renounced his royal post and dedicated the rest of his life in expounding the Periya Puranam and popularising the hymns of Saiva Saints.

Periya Puranam

Periya Puranam is a rare hagiography for all grades and classes. It is mainly a religious work but Sekkizhar has made it a literary masterpiece as well. He has raised it to the stature of an epic. The life of St. Sundarar with which the work starts, had provided him with materials necessary for an epic. His life was far different from that kind of life which is ordinarily considered saintly. He led a married life of love and purity and delighted to walk with God as his comrade in the open road of life that cannot be defiled with vital defects. He was the chosen one of Siva, who granted everything he prayed for. He dressed himself well and God Himself helped him to live a princely life. Sekkizhar sings his youthful life in colourful

grandeur upto the point where he gives out the list of all the Saints of Saivism (Tiruththonda Thokai) and then dashes off into the life of those Saints, leaving the rest of the life of Sundarar in suspense. He concludes his work with the other half of the life of Sundarar and thus makes the entire work, one united whole. The very form of his work exemplifies unity in diversity and its contents satisfy all.

Impress of Divinity

The literary merits of his work are too numerous to be narrated here. They match well with those of eminent epics in their beauty, brilliance and poetic imagery. The poet sees the impress of divinity in everything which his vision images. His sublime harmonies are aglow with the vernal radiance of spiritual emotion. Each one of them vibrates with the high-souled fervour of the Divine poet.

The word Puranam connotes life in the ancient Truth. Sekkizhar deals with the actual life led by the Saints. There is unmistakable evidence in the work itself that the poet visited most of the places where the Saints lived and verified the traditions current about them. As the prime minister of a state, he had ample facility for the necessary travel and verification. His work thus proves to be historically authentic.

The poet invariably describes the circumstances in which the various hymns of the Saints were sung and elucidates many intricate points in their songs and incidents in their life. Besides being a great artist, he has thus proved himself to be an expert interpreter of hearts as well.

We meet with a rare galaxy of Saints in this work. Men and women, the high and the low, the rich and the poor, kings and nobles, traders and labourers, preachers and peasants, the erudite and the illiterate, the civilized and the uncivilized-all shine alike in their saintliness and enjoy alike the fruits of Supreme Grace without any communal distinction whatsoever. Among them we find thirteen Vediars (Vaidics or Marayore), four Andanars (Sivachariars), six kings, five petty chiefs, five traders, thirteen vellalas, two weavers, besides a potter, an oil monger, a fisherman, a santrar, a washerman, a hunter, a harijan, a bard (panar) and some others of other categories not specifically designated. What a cosmopolitan brotherhood of saints should have existed in those golden days of Saivism and what an integration of spiritual emotion we find in their life! What a wonderful vista of saintly glory this great Epic of Saivism presents! Those who talk of emotional integration today, must read this great epic of Spiritual integration.

Martyrs at The Altar of Faith

The Saints of Periya Puranam were all devoted to God and all merciful to mankind. Their front shone white with sacred ashes, their breast with rosaries, their hands with service and their life with divine fervour. Their tongue was soaked in the honey of Sivanam. Their dress was simple and their demeanour humble. God led their destiny and they served God care-free. They sacrificed all, for the All-in-All. They boldly faced hostile challenges and came out of seething trials with the palm of victory for their traditional faith. The moral virtue of Indian womanhood and the spiritual courage of Saints in moments of death-dealing

ordeals, touch us with the pathos of a feeling heart towards martyrs at the altar of love and faith. If Saivism lives today as a philosophy of Godward evolution of the human soul, the credit goes to the immortal work of Sekkizhar which closely follows the rhythm and substance of the Thevarams - garland of divine songs. Now let us have a peep into the life of the holy Saints sung by Sekkizhar.

They were known as Nayanars. The word Nayanar means a faithful dedicated servant of God; Nayanars were devotees who lived, moved and had their being in Siva, the Supreme Lord.

1. Priests of Tillai

Lord Nataraja

Glory to Nataraja full of Grace-light. The drum in His hand sends out the sound of creative vibration. The fire burns all evils. "Fear not" shows one hand: 'Surrender at my feet' points another hand. One foot crushes demon Ego and another saviour foot lodges lovers under its protective shade. The cosmic dance of Nataraja goes on in the Chitakas-the expanse of pure consciousness. Sekkizhar sings:

"Hail cosmic Dancer of Tillai
The Origin, centre, measureless measure
Light, wisdom—all things manifest,
The Unique one, the Female and the Male
Hail cosmic Master, Dancer of Tillai!
Light transcending words, Thy form is compassion
Splendid presence enthroned on Vedic heights,
In the spacious Hall of super-consciousness,
Thou dancest. O how beautiful, O Lord
Glory to Thy saviour lotus feet!

Servants of Nataraja

Now we will speak about the glory of the Andanars, gentle sages, priests of Tillai. They tend the triple fire symbolising kindling of the cosmic energy. They are dedicated servants of Lord Nataraja who is their sole object of worship. Their merit is limitless. To love and serve the feet of Nataraja is their only *Tapasya*. They are His and in His name they do good deeds.

Dharma is their wealth and *grace* their reward. They take pride and delight in their service to the Lord of Chitakash.

Flawless Life

They become prosperous by the Grace of the God of Cosmic Dance. Their pedigree is spotlessly pure and holy. Their life is flawless and their character righteous. They fulfil the six obligations of learning, teaching scriptures, sacrifice, conducting sacrifices, giving and receiving gifts.........and are prosperous thereby. They know no poverty or misery. Their face shines with sacred ashes which they consider as their richest wealth. God-love is their limitless treasure. They follow the four-fold path of Charya, Kriya, Yoga and Jnana and lead an impeccable life of giving and austerity. They are family men leading a life of mental balance, patience, honour and flawless conduct.

Spiritual Leaders

They are three thousand divine priests, Andanars with psychic purity. They are not in need of heaven's bliss since they enjoy in this life here, the bliss of worshipping Nataraja. They live in perfect spiritual freedom. Their magnanimity transcends verbal description; they alone are their equals. They are true spiritual leaders. The Lord of Arur inspired St. Sundara to put their name at the very first line of his famous list of the servants of God in Thiruthonda Thokai. The Sages of Tillai are world-famous. Glory to these Savants of Vedas! Glory to the Lord of Cosmic dance-Nataraja!

2. Tirunilakanta Nayanar

Potter Nilakanta

A temple in Chidambaram is called "Temple of the Lord who restored youthhood to the old (llamai-akkiyar Koil). There is a story behind this. Listen.

There was a pious potter at Chidambaram living with his chaste wife. He was deeply touched by the compassion of Siva who swallowed the poison that rose from the churning of the Milk-ocean by Devas and Asuras. The deadly poison might have killed all but for the timely sacrifice of Siva in gulping it up. Siva's throat became blue-tinged by the poison. Hence he was called Nilakanta. The young potter made this name the mantra of his life. "Tirunilakantam" was always vibrating in his tongue and heart. He was therefore called Tirunilakanta.

Touch Us Not

The young potter's virtue was tarnished by sex-vice. His good wife tried in vain to dissuade him from this temptation. One day he came home late from a brothel and tried to touch her. She protested declaring a vow, "Ward, Oh, Tirunilkantam, Touch *us* not. Keep off." The husband stood stunned by the vow and repented. The rebuff was an eye-opener to him. "Chaste lady, you said touch *us* not. Us means not only you but all womankind. Yes, I shall no more touch or think of women. My thoughts shall be dedicated to my God

Nilakanta and my life to Purity." Thus he declared a terrible vow.

Grows Old

He never touched his wife thereafter. The wife served her husband faithfully but they slept apart in their dwelling. Freedom from sex-craving is the crowning virtue of human life. Tirunilakanta was now free from the one vice that had darkened all his pious virtues. The evils fell from his mind and gave his thoughts higher flights. He gave up carnal desires and grew old. She too grew old. But both were delighted in thoughts of the blue - throated Siva and in serving his devotees. Nilakanta made fine clay bowls and presented them to all God-loving ascetics. He forgot vital passions in his passion to love and serve Siva. The world respected him. But none knew his staunch secret vow. Siva willed to reveal his purity to humanity.

The Siva Yogi

A Siva Yogi stood before the Nayanar one hot day. Nilakanta welcomed him and his wife fed him well. Both ministered to his wants and aspired to serve him further. The Siva Yogi handed-over his clay-bowl to Tirunilakanta and went away saying he would come again to receive back the same. The Nayanar kept it in safe custody. Days passed away.

Give Me My Bowl

One day the Siva Yogi suddenly appeared and claimed his valuable bowl. Nayanar searched and searched but failed to find out the Yogi's bowl. He

stood nonpulsed, he offered to give the Yogi a fresh bowl. The Yogi refused it saying "Mine is nonpareil - I want that. You are hiding it. Cheat me not. Come now with my precious bowl". The Nayanar said politely, "I have not thieved your bowl, Sir, I am innocent. I shall stand to any test."

Yogi: Then bathe in that tank holding the hand of your son and then take an oath.

Nayanar: Sorry, I have no son, no issue.

Yogi: Then hold your wife by the hand and bathe.

Nayanar: Sir, we are under a hard vow of not touching each other - I shall singly bathe and take the oath. I can't touch any woman.

Yogi: Eh, I know your trick of evasion - Now come before the council of Tillai priests - come at once.

Bathe With Your Wife

Yogi: Good priests, behold this potter Nilakanta, he refuses to return my sacred bowl; he says it is lost. He must take his wife's hand and bathe in your tank and declare an oath too.

Council: Tirunilakanta, return the Yogi's bowl or do as he says - bathe with your wife.

Nayanar: Sirs, I would not touch any lady - not even my wife.

Council: Not even your wife - why?

Nayanar: A mystic vow keeps us apart.

Council: Anyhow you must do as the Yogin says - you must.

They Became Young Again

The pious potter then explained the secret of his vow of sexual purity. A stick was extended to his chaste wife. One of them catching hold of this end and the other that end of the stick, the old pair took a dip into the tank uttering "Siva Siva" when lo, the world saw a miracle! They plunged as old couples and rose up from the water as blooming youths: Holy priests showered flowers upon them and blessed their devout life. But where was the Siva Yogin? His form disappeared. Behold in the air, Siva and Uma riding on the bull - and harken to their voice! "Blessed souls - you have subdued your senses. Live long, fresh and young in mutual love! My Grace is with you - " The pious souls lived long and strong in love and faith of the Lord and attained final beatitude.

This is a story of rewakening in these days of sexploitation! Carnal lust weakens the mind. Conquest of the senses and sex control give tremendous psychic powers - Saivism did not advocate resort to the forests or the caves to conquer the senses. Live with your wife and conquer your senses. That is real victory. Sekkizhar calls Nilakanta the real victor who lived with his wife and yet free from vital craving.

3. Iyarpakai Nayanar

Give-All Saint

Is there a soul who offers in his devotional fervour, even his wife to a Sadhu? Yes, it was Iyarpakai who gave his all to lovers of Siva shining with sacred ashes on their faces. He was a merchant prince of Pumpukar, the flourishing capital of the Chola country. It is at the estuary of the Kauvery river and is called Kauveri - Pum - Pattinam. Iyarpakai was bounty personified but eccentric. His manners were contrary to human nature. His ways were peculiar. He was a fervent devotee of the Lord who wore the crescent and a lover of His Lovers. He gave without a second thought, whatever Saints demanded. God - lovers were dear to him for God was very dear to him. He had wealth but was not attached to it. God gave him plenty only to give liberally to the needy. His wife was a paragon of beauty shining with the lustre of chastity. She lived and thought in tune with her Sire. The cosmic Lord willed to reveal their sacrifice to the public. A Sage whose body was besmeared with holy ashes but had, however, the look of a sensualist, stood before the Nayanar, one day. The Nayanar respectfully received him and served his wants. The Sage knew his heart.

Give Your Wife

Sage: Iyarpakai, I have heard that you have the heart and hand to give anything to a Siva Bhakta.

Iyar: 'Yes, by His Grace; you can demand your desire.'

Sage: 'My mind is itching for a sweet lady companion. Your wife looks fair. Please give her to me. Would you?'

Iyar: 'Yes, gladly; it is in my power and possibility.

Sage: 'Thank you, Sir.—Now, do what you promised.'

Iyarpakai went inside and told his wife gently, 'Good lady, a Siva Bhakta wants you—I have promised to give you to him. Please come, go with him.'

Take My Wife

At this strange behest, the wife got bewildered. There was a wrench to her heart.

Wife: A husband, to give away his faithful wife, to a stranger! Ah! Siva!

Iyar: Do not be bewildered? You are my chaste and faithful wife. A faithful wife must obey the husband. I have promised to satisfy the demand of that Sage. He wants you; I give you. Please go with that holy man, O my better half! "Love and give" is the dictum of my life.

Wife: Anon—I obey my husband—Salutations, holy Sire.

Iyar: 'Sir, here is she. She is now yours. Take her with you'.

Sage: With great pleasure. You are a fine giver—I accept her.

Iyar: Fine. Do you want any further obligation?

Defend me

Sage: Yes, yes—when I walk along the road with your wife, her kith and kin and the public shall come down upon me and create trouble. A scuffle may ensue. They may scandalise me. They may think this an elopement. So, be my armed guard and safe conductor.

Iyar: It is my duty—I come anon.

He went in, armed himself strongly and followed the Sage, who was marching forward with beaming smiles.

Holla Bolla

The lady followed his footprints. The news spread like wild-fire. People and relatives raised a holla bolla: "Folly! folly! Our prestige and pedigree are gone!. To give a chaste wife to a nonentity! O Iyarpakai, are you not ashmed? Take back your wife home! We have heard of people giving land, cow, gold in gift, but never one's wife. To give away a chaste wife to a strange eccentric Sadhu! It is disgraceful! We can't allow this shameless perfidy! "Hallo, Sage, stop, we say! You cannot go further with that lady! Down with the wife-giver! What Sadhu is he who walks away with another's wife?"

Iyar: My dear Sirs, I have vowed to give Siva Bhaktas what they demand. That Sadhu wanted

my wife—and I gladly gave her to him. Do not stop them. Do not stand in their way. If you impede them, there shall be a stampede. I shall singly put you down and lead those two.

People: We challenge you. We will fight unto death. We shall not allow that seeming Sadhu, to usurp your wife! We shall shed the last drop of our blood for her. Sword for Sword! Stone for Stone!

Fight! Fight! Words! Noise! Affray! Stones! Shots! Cuts! Iyarpakai was an iron-man. He fought the incensed masses with the invincible strength of God; and won the day.

Come to My Rescue

The town was crossed and the forest too. The Sage and the lady reached Saikadu near Sirkazhi. The Sage said: "We are safe in this burial ground! You can take leave now. Your wife shall be safe. "Iyarpakai saluted him and turned back home. He went a furlong when again the mystic Sage roared out lamentations!"

"O, Sage Iyarpakai, hallo! Come to my rescue! O! tireless lover of God, give me refuge! O! strong heart, beloved friend, protect me! You have done rare acts of service! Come to my rescue!" Iyarpakai ran back crying "I come, I come! Fear not! Any harm-doer shall receive fatal blows!" His wife stood there dazed! The Sage melted away! Behold! There aloft in the sky! A beautiful splendour attracted them—Siva and Uma on the bull appeared to bless the pious pair! Both raised their hands in adoration!

Splendid Vision

"Hail Splendid Vision! Immutable Grace! Invincible Guide! Thou hast led me to joy! Glory to Thee, Limitless Bliss—Glory to Thy jingling feet dancing in the Hall of Superconsciousness!" The devotion of the husband and the purity of the wife were hailed by the Divine who called them now to the beyond felicity. Iyarpakai and his wife ascended to supernal regions of peace and bliss by the Divine Grace and there they saw in the Siva-loka the souls of all those that resisted the Sage.

Celestials showered blossoms of bliss. Vedas were chanted. Hymns hailed the sacrifice of Iyarpakai Nayanar and his wife. The whole Siva-loka was jubilant to receive these true devotees of God, these two benign givers of all, to God-lovers.

A Test of Faith

Let us, now, have a peep into the working of the mind of this eccentric Saint whose conduct is often misunderstood by the modern world. Philosophy had crossed the frontiers of dreamland which is usually assigned to it as its proper domain and has entered the practical life of the devotee.

Even when one conquers the sex instinct, still the attachment to the wife persists. It is no longer a carnal bond, but still it is a bond though of a spiritual nature. Iyarpakai with the courage of his conviction, severed these vital bonds. No love of fame or fear of disgrace clung to him. His attachment to wealth, wife, home,society and the world had all fallen off. He was divinely mad after God. He attained the super psychic

state of a supreme Yogi even in the midst of the grim struggle and turmoil of a family life. He achieved spiritual eminence of the highest order, by dint of his intense love of God and his devotees. He had not only the strength of his conviction but also the might of his arms to uphold his conviction against a world of resistance.

It was this strength of his mind and the love of his heart which were tested by the Lord. He came out of this test with the palm of victory. He and his wife were, therefore, rewarded with the Divine Bliss of the highest order.

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4. Mara Nayanar

Vow of Service

Let us now see the awe-inspiring sacrifice of Mara Nayanar, a tiller of Ilayangudi (a village near Sivaganga, Ramnad Dist.) He adored the jewelled feet of Siva and took pleasure in serving his devotees through stress and strain. He was a true Vellala, honest and industrious. He steered the plough as a husbandman and was rich in green wealth as well as the wealth of Divine Grace. His pure mind and broad heart were vowed to serve God in humanity. He saw Siva moving as Jiva. He realised the Divine in the human. He would seek and serve the servants of God. With courteous words, he greeted them, washed their feet, spoke kind words, seated them with reverence and served their needs with his wife who was an embodiment of chaste virtues. His joy was boundless in such a service to devotees. His fields yielded rich crops and his wealth mounted high. He enjoyed peace and plenty like Kubera, the Lord of riches. His days were rolling in luxurious wealth.

Dark Rainy Midnight

But Siva willed to test him and manifest his large heart to the world. Suddenly Mara's fields gave poor yields. His affluence decreased; he was reduced to chill penury. Even then, he continued his hospitalities. He lost his all, sold what he had and borrowed, to serve his guest at any cost. His devotion to duty never slackened even in the dark hours of his adversity. The bitter test came on.

It was dark winter midnight. Mara had closed the door. Rains were pouring in torrents. Nature's face was grim and frightful. Mara and his wife had no food for some nights past.

A mystic hungry ascetic called at Mara's home at that uncouth hour. He was an old sage; his body was drenched in the rain. He was trembling with cold.

Mara warmly received him, wiped out the wet from his body, gave him dry clothes, requested him to take rest in a cosy corner and came to his wife.

Mara: "My love! Behold the holy guest. How to feed him with our starving hands? I am dismayed. None will help us."

Wife: "We must feed the guest anyhow. But we need not despair. We have sown paddy today in our land. Go at once and collect enough of them. I shall make the best of them and provide good food to the guest."

Mara dared the dreadful night alone, he sallied forth tracing his path by the lightning flashes, muttering "Siva Siva" as thunder roared and rains poured! He covered his head with a palm-leaf basket, gathered the paddy seeds half germinated, washed together by the flowing rain water, filled his basket and hurried home. The wife washed clean the sodden grains, fried them dry, husked them and put them in a pot. But there was no fire-wood! Where to find it in a raining midnight? Mara tore a wooden rafter from the roof to light the fire. He then went to the back yard and brought some tender greens. The patient wife prepared different

dishes with those greens though a meagre meal after all. What a self-denial! What a faithful wife and what a dutiful husband! What a devotion and love to feed a stranger! "Lead the hungry guest here for a hot supper, my lord!" requested the wife.

"Gracious Lord, come and partake our humble fare—Excuse our shortcomings—Thou knowest everything Siva! Siva!" requested the husband.

"But where is the guest? A flood of light dazzled his eyes—Ah! wonder—Behold, Oh! my wife."

They saw a brilliant splendour! Darkness was gone. Hunger was appeased. There, on the Bull shone Siva with Uma of fragrant tresses.

God spoke:

"My devotees! you served my lovers faithfully. Come hence to Kailas. Live in peace, plenty and felicity! Even Kubera the lord of wealth shall stand you a sentinel. Live in everlasting bliss."

Ilayankudi Mara Nayanar and his wife, by dint of their God-love, service and sacrifice enjoyed eternal delight conscious of Siva in the Jiva. Consecrated lovers of God remain ever generous even if they are engulfed by poverty.

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5. Meiporul Nayanar

Be he a cunning imposter putting up appearances as a Siva Bhakta—he is excused even while he cuts a Saintly King's throat. Behold, here is Meiporul Nayanar whose life was a dedication to Truth which is God. He is the king of Cheti Nadu with his capital at Tirukovilur. He made the truth of the Vedas shine in his life and adored Godmen. He served his people lovingly and administered strict justice to all. Temple worship were done according to the rules of the Agamas. Holy hymns were sung and holy dance went on with ecstasy while the temple bells rang worship. He gave liberally to Siva Bhaktas whatever they wanted. He had reverence even for ash-coated hypocrites muttering "Siva Siva"; he was also brave in the battle-field.

The neighbouring Chief Muktinathan rose against him several times. Meiporul Nayanar routed him and disgraced him. Muktinathan felt it impossible to win Meiporul in the open field. So he disguised himself as a Siva Bhakta smearing his body with holy ashes.

He concealed a sharp sword folded in silk with a holy book on Agamas. The traitor, impostering an ascetic in sacred ashes, entered the palace. The guards were instructed to allow all Siva Bhaktas freely. He approached the bed-chamber of the king. The faithful guard Dhattan stopped him saying "King sleeps. Your Grace may select a proper time." The traitor asked him to stand aside and entered the chamber saying "I have vital instructions to give." Dhatta kept keen

watch over him from behind. The traitor stood near the cot; the queen rose up at once and woke up the king. The king saluted the ash-coated rogue.

Meiporul: "Fortune has brought you to me, O Saint, bless me and let me know what I can do for you."

Imposter: "Here is an Agama revealed by your Lord and I would read it to you alone, O King."

The queen left the chamber and the king was now alone with the imposter. He sat down and seated the traitor highly. He bowed to him and the traitor at once drew his hidden sword and dealt a deadly blow. Dhattan pounced upon the assassin like a tiger. But. the bleeding Nayanar while falling down protested saying "He is our own. Dhatta, do not harm him." Dhattan drew back and waited for orders. The king further said: "Escort him safely outside the city and see no harm is done to him."

The tragic news shook the city. People rose up to kill the traitor who stabbed their beloved king. Dhattan appeased them crying "I am under the royal command to leave him safely outside the city rampart". He did so and returned to the king. The king with beaming face said "O people, respect Saivism and those who carry its symbols. Practise our religion; have deep faith in Nataraja. With every breath, utter the five lettered Mantra NAMA-SIVAYA" With these last words, he steeped himself in meditation on Nataraja. The Lord appeared before him, showered His Grace upon him and gave his soul the bliss of ever dwelling at His jingling feet.

Meiporul was a martyr to holy mercy. The world of devotees adore him for ever.

6. Viranminda Nayanar

Senkundrur is a fertile hamlet amidst west hills. The pearl-teethed belles of the village sort out and string together in the order of their merit, pearls provided by the sea, by sugarcane, bamboo and by the elephant. There lived Viranmindar, a pious vellala, devoted to the feet of Siva and his servants. He had no cravings. He renounced wealth, home, name and fame and took delight in the company of devotees who had taken refuge at the feet of God. Once he visited Tiru Arur Temple and revelled in the joy of holy company in the thousand pillared hall, Devasiriyam. There was a big assembly of holy Saints there, singing fervently God's glory.

One day St. Sundarar visited Arur Temple. He went straight to the sanctum of Thyagaraja without taking notice of the above holy assembly. Viranmindar got incensed and cried aloud "O! Sundara, you have slighted this holy assembly adoring the feet of God. Hence you are excluded from the holy, as well as the holy feet of God".

St. Sundarar heard this remark and replied "Holy devotees, I did not slight you. But I deem myself unworthy of such a holy company—Now you have called me amidst you; let the Divine will inspire me to adore your feet".

Sundarar prayed to God and dedicated a thrilling and everfragrant Garland of Verses popularly known as

Tiru Thondatokai, a garland of holy servants of God. "Obeisance to the servants of servants of the Andanars of Tillai"—the Divine Himself commanded St. Sundarar to begin his Verse—garland like this and sing it amidst the holy assembly. Sundarar sang it there and the whole assembly hailed his love and fervour.

Thus Viranmindar owes our eternal thanks; for it was he who created an atmosphere for the famous garland of Saiva Saints whom Sekkizhar sang in his holy epic.

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7. Amarnithi Nayanar

Pazhayarai is a beautiful village on the banks of the Cauvery river in the land of the Cholas. It smiled green and gold with the luxury of Nature. Its streets rumbled with festive cars.

Amarnithi Nayanar was a rich merchant of the place dealing in gold, pearls, silks and textiles. His affluence increased as his generous heart expanded. His mind lived in God, his heart in compassion and his hand in the joy of giving. He considered wealth as God's own and himself as a trustee to the wealth. He never abused wealth in selfish pleasures but used it in celebrating festivals to Manikandar at Tirunallur and in maintaining a Mutt where devotees were fed, clothed and lodged. He used to give them cod pieces for underwear, every day. On one festive occasion Amarnithi stayed in the Mutt with his family continuing his charitable services.

One day God willed to grant him His Grace. He appeared before him in the form of a bachelor with tufted hair and ashed front. He wore a cod-piece (Kovanam). He had a deer skin to sit on and a staff to which were tied an ash-bag, cod-piece and holy grass. He walked along the street, and stood before Amarnithi Nayanar. The Nayanar welcomed him with beaming face and brimming love in his heart.

Amar: Salutations, O! Saintly Bachelor! Welcome to this Mutt! You can live here conveniently.

Bachelor : "All right, Amarnithi, I have heard much about your generosity to Siva Bhaktas. It is raining. Here is my dry cod-piece. I leave it with you. I shall have a dip in the Cauvery and take it back on my return. Keep it safely.

Amar : Most willingly.

Amarnithi kept it in a safe place. The Bachelor disappeared. Amarnithi anxiously looked for him ready with a feast. The Bachelor returned drenched in the pouring rain. Amarnithi offered to wipe the wet and give him dry clothes. "Give me atonce my cod-piece entrusted to you Sir—at once !

Amarnithi searched and searched for it; it had disappeared mysteriously. His wife too searched for it in vain. Amarnithi was bewildered. He offered fresh clothes.

Amar : Wear this, Sir, removing your drench.

Bachelor : Ah, you have stolen my precious cod-piece. How dare you deny it and force upon me another cloth ? Come out now with my cod-piece.

Amarnithi was perplexed. He fell at his feet and offered silks and gems and also a fine cod-piece in exchange.

The Bachelor said at last "here is another cod-piece of mine tied in my staff. We will weigh it in a balance with all your gifts. Give me an equal weight of your treasures". The scales were held right. On one scale-pan the Bachelor placed his cod-piece. Amarnithi piled on the other all the clothes kept for

distribution to the poor. That scale went up. All the silks and yarns were placed; then all the golden jewels and gems were placed; still the scale hit the beam. The wealth of the Nayanar could not weigh with a single cod-piece of the Bachelor. As a last resort, Amarnithi pleaded "O! mystic Sage, I have given my all now; what is left is my family—I, my wife and my son. Allow us to sit in the balance." "Fine, do", ejaculated the Bachelor.

The pious three went round the Bachelor and the scale. "If our love is genuine, if our surrender to Thee is perfect and flawless, if our dedication is pure, let the balance be well equipoised".

With these words they sat on the balance. They prayed to the God of Tirunallur uttering "Namasivaya, Namasivaya!" Lo! wonder! Well weighed. Well balanced—Hara Hara Mahadeva! "Take all. O Sage! Nothing but Siva is left in the Jiva!" What a splendid sight! A voice was heard in the firmament "O! pure devotees, ascend up with the scales, up, up to my heaven. Enjoy eternal bliss. You have followed God's will and law. You have attained Karma Samyam, balancing of acts and mental purification." The Grace descended on them and all worldly ties were snapped. They had the beautiful vision of the Divine and salvation sought them.

8. Eripaththa Nayanar

Karuvur is one of the royal cities of Anabaya Chola, the people's popular king. Clouds gather on its ramparts. Justice-bell rings at the palace portal. Rows of mansions rise to the sky. Its groves are fragrant with flowers and fruits. The tresses of its damsels are fragrant with jasmines. Tuskers play in its tanks. Peacocks dance in its luxuriant gardens. Tiger glitters on its victorious flag. Even Indra's Amaravati cannot equal this city. There is a beautiful temple in the city called *Aanilai*: Lord Siva in its sanctum, stands firm in the heart of his devotees.

Eripaththa Nayanar was a staunch devotee of the Lord. He was strong and sturdy and held a heavy axe to defend lovers of God. He was a defender of our faith.

Sivakami Andar was a passionate devotee of Aanilai Sivam. He was very old and walked with a stick. He rose up very early, took his bath, wore dry clothes, tied his mouth and entered the garden in the crimson dawn. His skilful hand gathered fresh flowers even before the bees sat on them. He returned with his basket and wove garlands for the temple deities.

One fine morning, the old man collected enough of flowers and walked to the temple. Just at that time the Mahout bathed the royal elephant, adorned it well and marched it towards the palace near the temple. The elephant suddenly turned wild and in a fit of

frenzy plucked the basket of Andar and scattered the flowers on the road dust and went on. The old man ran after it with his stick, but to no purpose. He fell down and cried bitterly: "O, Sivatha! Sivatha! donning the elephant skin, I brought fragrant blossoms for Thy worship. This mad elephant has scattered in the dust and crushed the flowers meant for Thee. Save me O, Siva, Siva!" The elephant driver showed a rude arrogance. None had the sympathy to help the old devotee. It was the king's elephant, moreover.

One dauntless soul hurried to the spot flaming with rage and said: "I shall kill this infatuated beast that insulted the old devotee of God and desecrated the flowers meant for my Lord. Good man, where is that elephant which treated you thus?" The old devotee cried: "It went along this street destroying my flowers" Eripaththa ran with frantic anger and daringly attacked the tusker with his axe. The frenzied elephant tried to throw him down with its trunk and crush his bones. Eripaththa quickly hit it with his keen axe and cut its proud trunk. The Mahout and his men attacked Eripaththa who snatched them by their legs, threw them down and gave them death-blows. "Horror, horror! Terror, terror!" cried king's men. They rang the justice-bell and sent loud complaints to the king. Army chiefs followed the king fully armed with lethal weapons, bows, arrows, spears, clubs, javelins, battle axe, iron balls etc. Swords rattled vengeance! "Who killed the elephant?" cried the king. "I, friend of god-lovers," said Eripaththa standing before the king with his axe dropping blood! "Here, here is the killer," cried all. "O, Eripaththa Nayanar!. Salutations," spoke the king gently.

King: "Soldiers! Stop there. No more rattling of swords! Something has gone wrong. Who has wronged you, O, Nayanar?"

Eripaththa: "Me? No. Behold there the pious old man Sivakami Andar. He brought fresh flowers for temple worship. This mad elephant plucked off his flower basket, threw the flowers in the dust and trampled upon them. What a sacrilege! The Mahout was indifferent and defiant. Hence, I killed these profane offenders. They have insulted God and His devotee."

The king trembled with fear and agony! "Anti-divine offence! In my city! I bow before you, O, Nayanar! The elephant is mine! I feel ashamed. The duty of its right behaviour devolves upon me. I am hence responsible for its offence. I am the sinner! Eripaththa, you are ready to allay the misery of God-lovers. Here is my sword . Cut off my head! I shall sacrifice my life for this offence done to Siva by my elephant."

Eripaththa: O, noble king, my heart shudders before your resolve. You are love and justice incarnate. I killed your elephant and its driver. You were not offended. On the other hand, you bear the brunt of the offence and want me to put you to the sword. Give here the sword. Perhaps you may yourself cut your head. I shall not see you die. All these have taken place around my angry axe. I am the sinner. I shall commit suicide with your sword Siva, Siva."

Eripaththa was pressing the sword upon his neck. The king plucked it with a trembling haste and cried "O, God. Save Thy ardent servant." An oracle was

then heard in the void! "Stop Eripaththa! All these happened to reveal your spiritual fervour to humanity. His will toppled the flower-basket. All ends well. Rise up elephant! Rise up Mahout!" Lo the elephant rose alive. The Mahout rose up as if from slumber and adored the feet of the Nayanar. Eripaththa fell at the feet of the Chola king. Both embraced each other in love. Sivakami Andar too was appeased to know that all happened by the Divine Will. Who can resist His Will? "O, king sit upon this royal elephant. We will come behind, proclaiming the Glory of Siva!" said Eripaththa. There was an impressive procession. "Who can measure Thy Grace, O Siva! Who can equal Eripaththa in the heroic defence of one's faith! The peerless king, who can equal him in justice! Long live Love-Divine!" People hailed the king and the Nayanar and enhanced their Divine fervour. Aum Sivam!

9. Enathinatha Nayanar

Enathi Nayanar, was a heroic Swordsman of Einanur in the Chola Kingdom. He taught how to wield the sword to princes and heroes. He lived by that profession and spent what he earned in heroism, in serving the true devotees of Siva. An ash-mark will do to command his respect. He was very popular among bold devotees.

He had a rival named *Atisura*, also a swordsman. He was a haughty, proud, swaggering braggart. He was very jealous of Enathinatha's power and popularity and collected an army of ruffians to attack him. Like a fox howling at a tiger, Atisura yelled out his challenge one day, before the cottage of Enathinathar who came out armed for a fight. Both had an army of followers. "Let's fight for our prestige. The Winner shall hence be the Army-Teacher" said Atisuran. "Alright!" replied Enathi.

Sabres swirled and whirled like lightnings. Hatchets felled a few this side and a few that side. Flaming swords rattled and battled. The enemies were routed like the night of falsehood before the dawn of Truth. Atisura was discomfited before the invincible Enathinatha. He knew now that Enathinatha cannot be conquered by sword and so he adopted a cunning device.

Vengeance wore a traitor's guise. He called Enathinatha for a duel. The Nayanar accepted the challenge. The traitor painted his forehead thick with

ashes. He hid it first with his shield and attacked the Nayanar like a frantic bull; malicious duel went on. Nayanar's sword drew near the villain's throat; he quickly lifted his shield and out shone his front, white with holy ashes. "Ah! you wear the symbol! Siva! Siva! Siva! How can I kill you?" ejaculated the Nayanar. He well understood his intention and thought of drawing back his sword. But he stood with his sword and shield lest a devotee of Siva be disgraced for killing one without arms. The traitor cut his throat. Enathinatha Nayanar fell a martyr to his faith in Siva and Vibhudhi (holy ashes), the symbol of Saivism. God appeared before him and granted him the bliss of eternal Siva-consciousness. Even the traitor's black heart must have received the white-blaze of the Nayanar's flaming sacrifice!

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10. Kannappa Nayanar

Hills reverberate with thundering water falls. Forests echo with the roaring of elephants, grunting of boars and the yelling of jackals. Tigers growl, hounds snarl as the hunters of the hill lead a rapid chase. These animal sounds are pierced by the Kuravai-dance tunes of ladies praying to Lord Murugan for the welfare of their kith and kin. Such is the fertile Uduppur cradled in the hill-grandeur of Kalahasti. Nagan, the dauntless hunter, ruled over this hill tract. His wife, Taththai was his true companion in bravery. They prayed to Murugan, the hill-god for a child, offering cocks and peacocks to his temple and holding kuravai dances!

Lord Muruga gave them a strong and sturdy child. They named him Thinnan, the strong - willed. His body was dark like clouds and his heart was merciful like nimbus. There was a radiance in his smiling face and a light in his powerful words. He was the pet of the hill-tribes. They adorned him with flowers and leaves, peacock feathers, horns, ivory ornaments, tiger nails and boar-tusks. They enjoyed his tinkling leaps to the sonorous beat of their drums and trumpets, following the silvery tunes, jingling timings and graceful skippings. Thinnan's childish pranks delighted the hunter village. As a boy, he learnt archery and spearing. He chased the wild animals and tamed their ferocity. It was a festive day when he shot the first arrow. The hill tribes decorated him with gold,

pearls, diamonds, ivory ornaments and tiger-teeth and nails. A grand feast was given to all. Honey and toddy flowed freely. Fruits and millets, bamboo-rice and pork were made into cakes and puddings and the guests relished the feast and revelled in songs and dances. The hunter-damsels formed a dance-ring around Thinnan.

Thinnan grew into a brave youth of sixteen, when Nagan crowned him as his successor and handed to him his sword and royal insignia. All the hunters paid him homage and obeyed his command. He did them good turns every day and kept his subjects free from wants. He looked majestic with all ornaments that the hills provided-ornaments made of tusks, horns, peacock feathers, tiger and deer skins. He wore garlands of pearls and ivory; his feet jingled with belled-anklets. The twang of his bow and arrows proclaimed his heroism. The hounds leaped forward; hunters followed Thinnan, measuring steps to drums, bugles and conches. They poured into the hill-forests like a black-stream flowing into sea and sent out peals of drums and trumpets, to frighten wild animals in ambush.

They spread nets to catch them. An angry wild boar tore the net with its horns and ran for life. Thinnan with his close companions Nanan and Kadan chased it, killed it at the foot of a hillock and took it up the green Kalahasti hill, garlanded by the Mugali river. Thinnan felt a mystic peace and bliss as he walked through the green woods of the hill where *Kudimi Thevar* (Tufted God) was present. At the suggestion of his friends, Thinnan was drawn unawares, to Kudumi Thevar. The gentle breeze fanned his tired limbs. The mumbling Mugali sang

into his soul. He ordered Kadan to set fire and bake the boar's flesh for a repast and went up the hill with a new alacrity. It was like a pilgrim progressing to a new spiritual life, crossing the vital-mind step by step. The pilgrim Jiva was mounting to the abode of Siva, leaving behind all Tatvas (reals). The Divine Grace dragged him on away, away from the mundane trifles. There, there Siva, the tufted God, came to his sight. His burdens fell; he felt a delightful thrill. His psychic being was transformed into a frenzy of passionate love for that Siva Lingam there. "O, how I missed you all these days, my beloved Lord! How is it that you are lonely in this forest of bears, tigers and lions? Why did you reveal yourself to me so late! You must be hungry, my Lord! Wait, I will bring you fine pork, baked afresh. Alas, who has thrown upon my Lord water and bilva leaves?"

Nanan who was curiously watching Thinnan said "I have seen a priest pouring water upon this Lingam and placing these leaves upon it. He used to offer also food to Kudumi Thevar." "Pish, we will offer fine pork and perform a lovely puja to our dear God!" exclaimed Thinnan. Come Nanan, we will get ready the pork— Nanan went forward—

Thinnan could not be away from the beloved Siva even for a minute. He merged deep into boundless exhilaration. He had no words for his joy. He was dumb with ecstasy. His heart was all love soaked in the fervour of psychic devotion. He embraced, kissed, wept and babbled "Siva, Siva!" Tears trickled from his eyes fixed in Kudumi Thevar! His companion was anxious about his abnormal features. He was afraid of

his frantic devotion to Kudumi Thevar. Kadan said "Kudumi Thevar has charmed him." They little understood his divine intoxication. "What has become of you, our king Thinnan!", they cried. Thinnan was deaf to their cry, dumb with divine frenzy. His followers were observing him with silent bewilderment and then they left for their home.

Thinnan roasted the pieces of pork, tasted them one by one, gathered in a leaf-cup the palatable ones soaked in honey. He filled his mouth with the river water. He gathered wild flowers and kept them in the locks of his hair. "O, my lovely lord is hungry there," he murmured, as he hurried to the Siva Lingam of Kalahasti.

With his chappals, he cleared the leaves and flowers, already offered to God by the priest. He poured the water from his mouth as *abhishekam*, and adorned the Lingam with the flowers kept in his hair. Then, he offered his meat telling, "My Lord, eat, eat, eat all", Puja finished, with bow and arrows he stood a sentinel to the lonely Lord watching over the temple all night long. The gems on the head of Cobras, fire flies and stars above, twinkled light for his vigil. The day dawned; birds sang; the sun embraced his breast with its admiring rays. Nature stood in awe at his devotional fervour. Thinnan looked at the Siva Lingam and muttered: "My Lord, had you a sound sleep last night? Now you must have a nice breakfast—I go anon for a hunt—My beloved Lord, would you feel lonely until my return? Mind fixed in you, I go in search of viands for you—" He disappeared into the thick forest—murmuring, "my Lord, my God".

The priest Sivakosari came there for the routine morning worship. He was pained to see the desecration done overnight. His decorations were spoiled; flesh and bones were scattered around. He muttered mantras of resanctification, cleaned the image and the precincts with water. He adored God ceremoniously, closed the temple and went away sprinkling water around the image with incantations.

Thinnan now hurried with pork and flowers and water in his mouth as was his wont. He brushed aside the ceremonial decorations done by the priest. He continued his own habitual worship, offered meat to the deity, embraced it, kissed it, gazed at it as if he would swallow it with his eyes. At night-fall he began his ardent vigil. At the point of the day, he again went out for a hunt.

The priest again saw the innovations. Again he was vexed and cried, "O Lord, who has done these profane acts! Tell me, O Lord! How can I bear this sin! Who is it that commits this sin!" He fasted until God told him the truth.

Thinnan, as usual, killed swine and deer and offered animal food to his Kudumi Thevar. Thus went on the priestly ceremonial worship and again the ardent anti-ceremonial love-worship of the hunter. The high-priest's ceremony and the hunter's sacrilege, that satvic and this rustic worship continued for a week. Thinnan continued to offer honeyed meat to the Lord saying, "My dear Lord, this meat is very sweet. I tasted it and selected the best for you—take it."

His friends came; the parents hurried with anxiety. Sorcerers and exorcists came and tried their

incantations in vain. Thinnan was too deeply immersed in Siva-consciousness to care for what went on around him. The priest's ritual and the rustic's spiritual sincerity were seen by God. One day Lord Siva appeared in the dream of Sivakosari and revealed the truth:

"O priest, behold tomorrow what Thinnan does. His love is pure and his worship fervent. He has forgotten body, home and surroundings. His dedication to me is absolute and blemishless. I am immensely pleased with the hunter's unsophisticated love and faith. Thinnan's form is my love; his knowledge is knowing me; his actions are dear to me. His very existence is a stream of Siva-consciousness. This sincere fervour has come to him not from book but from inner look, not from the thinking brain but from the feeling heart, not from study but from a devotion so steady. I feel the tender feet of my child Murugan in his chappals which sweep away your flowers. The water spit from his mouth is more sacred to me than Ganges. The flowers showered upon me from his hair are the fragrant blossoms of his flawless devotion. His meat is a devout offering roasted in the holy fires of blazing love-sacrifice. His babblings of love are more than Vedic hymns. O priest, observe from behind a bush his divine fervour, tomorrow—and know that simple sincerity is more than learned ceremony.

It was a day of test which was to manifest the Divine Grace. After finishing his puja the priest hid himself behind a bush and observed with surprise what happened.

Thinnan hurried with meat and flowers but felt the day bleak and cheerless; he saw bad omens. There

was no smile in Nature's face. Tinnan washed the idol with water from his mouth, showered upon it the flowers from his hair, offered meat-food saying, "Eat, my God, eat!" But the Lord's right eye was shedding blood! "Alas, who has hit your eye, my Life?" cried Thinnan. He stood aghast for a while, then ran here and there and brought some herbs. He squeezed the herbs into the eye. The bleeding did not stop. He wept bitterly and as a last recourse, with his sharp shaft, he plucked out his right eye and fixed it on the right eye of Siva. The bleeding stopped and Thinnan danced in frantic delight. He felt happy, that his eye cured the bleeding eye of Siva. But suddenly the left eye of the Lord was bleeding. "O Lord, take my left eye too. I shall hence see you with my heart's eye," said Thinnan, as his keen arrow was applied to pluck the left eye. A mysterious force drew back his hand. A voice was heard in the air: "Stop, Kannappa" Thinnan had fixed up his chappals on the bleeding eye lest he should miss it, when he became blind after losing both the eyes. The Lord blessed him, affectionately touched his right eye and lo, the sight was restored! "Kannappa, stand on my right side; let the world take example from your love and faith," said the Lord. "Kannappan means he who plucked his eye (Kan) and fixed it on Siva's bleeding eye. Thinnan, known to the world by that awe-inspiring name—KANNAPPAN, found his lasting abode, on the right side of Siva.

The priest saw all these happenings from behind the bush; now he adored Kannappan and learnt from him the true fervour of the heart that evoked Divine Grace.

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11. Kalaya Nayanar

Tirukkadavur is a famous pilgrim centre in the land cherished by the Cauveri. It is the place where Siva kicked off Yama (God of Death) by His feet. Its verdant nature is fragrant with the smiles of floral beauty. Prayers and pastorals thrill its atmosphere. It is a land flowing with milk and honey. Even its lotus smells milk. Its fields are rich with golden grains and their ridges roll with pearls. Its atmosphere breathes fragrant with sweet-smelling flowers and incense.

There was a holy man in this town called Kalaya Nayanar—pure, learned and pious. He took pleasure in burning before the sanctum of Siva, guggulu or *kungiliyam*, the Indian dammar used as incense. The fumes of this incense purify the air and create a holy atmosphere. Kalaya Nayanar was so fervent in burning *kungiliyam* before Siva that he was known as Kungiliya Kalaya Nayanar. Suddenly he became poor. Yet he sold his all and carried on the *kungiliyam* service.

He was reduced to starvation; yet he continued his service to God. The test came at last when the family had no food for two days. The only thing left was the Tali, marriage badge, on the neck of his faithful wife. A Hindu lady holds her Tali dearer than life, for it is the sacred symbol of a chaste wife-hood. Yet the good house-wife removed her golden Tali tying an yellow string in its place and gave it to her sire saying "Despair not, my lord;

this Tali-badge can feed us a month. Please sell it and get provisions for our home." What a daring sacrifice!

Kalaya Nayanar, with tears in his eyes, received the tali with trembling hands and went out promising to bring food-stuffs. He was walking along the busy bazaar street, when a *kungiliyam*-merchant met him on the way, and the Nayanar forgot his starving home and food.

Nayanar: Sir, what is in your bundle?

Merchant: Fine *kungiliyam*, sir.

Nayanar: *Kungiliyam*! Very well! That is what I need for my humble daily service to my Lord Siva. O! Lord, let me die without my daily food, but my daily service must go on! I forget rice; let me have kungiliyam for this piece of gold. Merchant-Sir, behold this Tali of my wife! Would you exchange this for a bag of kungiliyam?

Merchant: Gladly, sir, this piece of gold can purchase the bag of kungiliyam that I have.

Kalaya Nayanar took the incense bag, walked in ecstasy to the temple and kept it safe in the temple store beaming with love divine.

The Nayanar threw enough of guggulu into the incense-pot. The perfumed fumes inspired him with hymns.

"Forget home, forget rice
Revel in this sacrifice!

Forget body, forget hunger
Sing Siva, O, my soul's fervour"!

The Nayanar forgot himself in the ecstasy of his flaming dedication to Siva.

What about the starving family!

The omniscient One directed His Grace towards the starving home. The housewife and children prayed to Siva and forgot hunger in sleep. A dream-voice was heard "O, chaste lady, wake up and see! Your home prospers! Behold, it is full and rich. Now prepare food and feed your family." The lady woke up and saw with surprise, rich provisions before her. "Gratitude, O, Siva, O, Mercy, Salutations", ejaculated the grateful wife, as she prepared food and expected her Sire. Kalaya Nayanar, in the temple, was steeped in divine-communion, when a voice woke him up saying, "Go home now, O Kalaya, and have a good repast."

He went and saw a new rich home, richly provided. He could not believe his eyes. The wife led him to a delicious feast.

"O! miracle of God's Grace!, ejaculated Nayanar "Siva has led us from fast to feast." His devotional fervour increased tenfold and he spent all that Siva gave, in serving Him and His devotees. Siva's name was in his tongue, Siva's light in his heart and Siva's service in his limbs.

Siva now willed that the greatness of the Nayanar should be made known to humanity. There was a Siva-temple at Tiruppanandal. The Siva Lingam at its sanctum declined on one side. The Chola King

who came to worship the Lingam, was pained to see the image and tried his best to make it straight. Ropes were tied round the image, men pulled the rope, and then elephants pulled it. None could bring the image straight to its position. No human power was of any avail. The King felt sorely distressed.

Kalaya Nayanar heard of the grief of the King and thought he could be of service to the King. He hurried to Tiruppanandal and adored the Lord with flowers. Then he burnt his kungiliyam saying "O, Siva, Siva, stand straight before us—straight, straight." The fumes and flames of his deep fervour worked wonders. The Lingam assumed its original straight pose by the power of Kalaya Nayanar's flaming devotion.

The King fell at his feet and praised him saying "You have given us today the delight of adoring Siva. The power of your faith and love has surpassed and surprised human strength. God-love is mightier than man's power"

The king renewed the temple and Kalaya Nayanar stayed there for a few days, inspiring devotion in the heart of all, returned home and continued his usual services to Siva and his lovers.

Appar and Sambandar the great Saints of Saivism graced his home with their presence and consented to be his guests. Kalaya Nayanar lived long in love of Siva and attained final beatitude at His feet.

Devotion and dedication glorify human life and transform it into life divine.

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12. Manakkanchara Nayanar

Charu in Tamil is juice. There was a fertile village, flowing with cane-juice and honey. Hence it was called *Kancharur*, village of sweet-juice. There was a great devotee in the village who always had God in his thought. His life was a dedication to the love of God and to the service of His lovers. He was so helpful to the place that people respected him as Mana-Kancharar-the pious benefactor of the village Kancharur.

He dedicated his heart to the love of God, his mind to the thought of God, his tongue to prayer, his soul to meditation and his life to the service of His devotees. Devotees of God were at home under his hospitable roof.

This Nayanar had no issue and prayed to God for one. God gave him an angelic daughter graceful and beautiful. The daughter grew into a girl of charming looks and winsome manners. The Nayanar proposed to give his fair daughter in marriage to a princely devotee called Eyarkone Kalikkamar. The solemn ceremony was to take place the next day when a test came upon his sincerity of love for God and His devotees.

It was just a day before the marriage. The bridegroom and his party were expected in the village. The home put forth a festive appearance. God appeared before the Nayanar in the form of a holy

sage. He was fire-coloured; his body was smeared with sacred ashes; he wore Rudraksham (sacred beads) and rosaries and shoulder-strap. He wore beads on his tufted hair. The Nayanar welcomed him with devotion, adored him and said:

"I am fortunate in having your holy presence during this happy occasion."

The sage: "Alright, sir; what is this happy occasion?"

Nayanar: "The marriage of my dear daughter takes place tomorrow by your grace."

The sage: "I bless you."

Nayanar went in, brought his daughter and asked her to bow down to the sage and when she bowed down, her glossy black tresses glowing like a cloud, impressed the sage.

Sage: "Nayanar, your fair daughter has beautiful tresses. I have need of that hair for the sacred thread of hair I wear. Would you kindly give me the entire hair adorning her head?"

Who would ask such an impossible gift and who would grant it on such a festive occasion! Will any girl part with her tresses and that on the day of her wedlock? But Manakkanchara Nayanar dared to give the gift and his beautiful daughter submitted to this strange trial. The father took a razor, removed the flowers and ornaments and shaved clean the head of his daughter and calmly said, "Holy Sir, here is my daughter's entire hair."

But where is the holy sage! Vanished! A light shot forth, in and out. Lo! the dazzling presence of Siva with Uma!

The Nayanar flew into ecstasy as he adored the Divine effulgence. A voice was heard in the air, "You have stood my test, O, sincere soul! Your place is always by my side! Prosper and be happy!"

The Nayanar danced crying "Aum Sivam, Aum Sivam! Beautiful tresses grew up on the shaven head. The bridge-groom was ecstasied and was happy to marry the girl. The marriage ceremony went on solemnly.

The bold sacrifice of the Nayanar bore fruit in the eternal delight of his soul.

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13. Arival Taya Nayanar

Kanamangalam was a fertile village in the Cauvery-land. Tayanar was its saintly citizen noted for his Divine fervour and large heart. He offered every day to Siva in the temple, superior rice, cabbage and tender mango. He was unfailing in this offering. But the test came when poverty reduced his means. He faced chil penury with all the warmth of his devotion. He did bread labour during harvests and got paddy as wages. He set apart the superior variety for God and used the inferior one for home. It once happened that all the fields yielded only superior paddy. The Nayanar got that as wages but consecrated all to God.

The other variety was not available for his home consumption. He was starving with his family. All that was available for them was a mash of green leaves. They lived upon leaves and offered superior paddy, cabbage and tender mango to God as usual. Even the greens got scarce and the devoted couple lived on mere water. Tayanar became weak and thin by starvation and yet he never failed in his daily offering. One day he was carrying the routine offerings to the temple when, he staggered and swooned on the road. The offerings were scattered in the dust. "Alas," he murmured, as he opened his eyes "offerings are gone to dust! Why should I live a day of non-offering? I shall cut here my throat. Why should I proceed there?" He pressed a sharp sword into his neck. God, the merciful, held off the

hand of the devotee which kept the sword. The wound healed up. The Lord accepted the mangoes scattered in the dust. The Nayanar heard a voice crying "Ah, delightful tender mangoes...leave not, leave none..." The Lord restored him his strength and vigour. The Nayanar stood up with new energy and praised the unseen Divine fervently: "Hail Siva, Coral hued Lord smearing Vibhuti, Your mercy has accepted my humble offering, from the dust and the dirty ground. How blissful I am! I am an eternal slave of your Will, O, compassion! Let me live in your Grace to serve your Will". Lo, Siva with Uma beautiful like an emarald creeper blessed him saying "Your action is good; your dedication is pure. You have a place in my heaven and your wife too; come". God led the Nayanar to his high abode. Tayanar was known as Arival Taya Nayanar since he dared to cut his head with a sword (arival).

The fervour and sacrifice of these Saiva Saints, inspire in us Divine love and the spirit of utter surrender to His Will.

14. Aanaya Nayanar

Aanaya was a lovely shepherd who lived in the fertile village of Mangalam. He tended the cattle affectionately. He was a fervent devotee of Siva. He led the herd of cows to the green pasture land, and after sumptuous grazing, he made them drink water in a clear pool. He protected them from wild animals. He served the cows with a spirit of consecration. Under his motherly care, the cows increased in number and all were hale and healthy. He made a flute according to the laws of music, and played in it the sacred five letters, Namasivaya, and the whole atmosphere thrilled and vibrated with that sacred mantra. His flute-voice charmed the animate and inanimate world.

One cloudy winter day, he led his cows to the grazing meadow. Some other shepherds too followed him. There he saw a laburnum tree (Kondrai), smelling and smiling sweet with bunches of beautiful flowers and its fruits were shining like the plaited tresses of Siva. Aanaya imagined the form of Siva in the flower-and-fruit-laden tree; his heart melted at the vision of Siva in that beautiful tree ; he was merged in Siva-consciousness. Siva inspired him from within. Aanaya took his flute, put it to his coral lips, breathed a humming Aum even like bees intoxicated with the lotus honey, and then struck ravishing melody importing the rhythm of the Sivamantra. The magic harmony of the divine symphony thrilled the atmosphere.

Aanayar charmed the ears of all beings, men, women, children, deer, sheep, cows, bulls, birds and

all were caught in a frenzy of longing to drink more and more of the song-thrill. They flocked in large numbers to him and stood enchanted by his music breathing God's glory. They were unaware of one another and their heart throbbed in tune with Aanayar's tunes of devotional fervour. They united with him in the soul. The cattle gathered close to him. Cows forgot to chew their cuds. Calves drank music instead of milk. Blades of grass were falling from the mouth of fawns and tender cows. Birds did not peck at fruits. They hushed up their songs intoxicated by the flute-melody. Peacocks stood spreading their gorgeous feathers but could not dance. They were charmed by the melody of Sivanam. Shepherds renounced home and work and forgot themselves in the song of passionate devotion. Celestials stood with men and women charmed by the ambrosial notes bursting out of the magic flute of Aanayar. The deer stood with the tiger, the lion with the elephant forgetting enmity. The whole atmosphere was charged with love divine. Even the wind blew not; leaves did not move. The hill-streams did not murmur. Clouds above did not pour; thunders did not roar. Billows did not roll. The divine music of Aanayar played in solemn silence of inner communion, breathed peace and harmony in all souls and uplifted them to Siva, the universal Divine.

The divine harmony mounted up to the wide firmament and higher up to the heaven where Siva enjoyed it—Siva with his consort pleased with the devotional harmony of Aanaya, appeared before him and said "My lover, adore me with your flute-music which touches and charms all souls. Unite souls through music and my Grace is with you."

Aanayar saluted the luminous Presence, continued his music-offering until he attained at-one-ment.

Music plays an important role in Saivism. We have thousands of hymns in Tamil put to melodious tunes as early as the seventh century A D and no other religious literature has a rich treasure of musicology in such an early period. Sekkizhar discloses an intimate knowledge of the art of music in handling the flute and setting it to scales and notes of varied tempos.

15. Murti Nayanar

The ancient Pandya land is aglow with the gorgeous beauty of Nature. It is rich with fields of golden yields. Its people of ripe wisdom, live in happy mansions with high turrets, encircled by brooding clouds. Madurai, its majestic capital, is a poem of hallowed beauty cradled in the silver strains of the Vaigai stream. It is like the Goddess of Prosperity seated in the pollen - heart of an immortal lotus. Its victorious fish - flag wafts high in the gentle breeze of honeyed - fragrance. Its atmosphere breathes with the flute - and - lute voice of the Sangam bards who have enthroned Mother Tamil on the sublime height of World-renown. Lord Siva Himself sat with the Sangam savants to enjoy the nectar thrills of the Tamil-Muse.

The sea kissing the Pandyan coast, brings with its tossing billows, rich tributes of lustrous-pearls. These pearls shine on the breast of Pandyan girls gay with bashful giggles and gaming with gemmed balls. Its spiritual glory soars high with the winged strains of sacred hymns dedicated to the fish-eyed goddess-Minakshi and flame-hued Sundereswara. In this empire of Siva, there lived a pious rich merchant, a Nayanar.

His name was Murti Nayanar. He was an embodiment of Divine love. He took delight in offering sandal paste which he prepared with his own hands. This sandal paste of Murti Nayanar smelt sweet with

the fragrance of his heart's fervour. A test confronted his holy hest.

An alien king invaded Madurai, defeated the Pandyan king and usurped the throne of Madurai. He was a lover of Jainism and he hated and persecuted lovers of Siva. He was hard against Murti Nayanar who bore with patience all trials and tribulations and carried on his dedicated service to God. No hostile force could shake his faith and no adversity could stop his duty. Can white ants eat away the steel? Can moths affect a flame? Can undivine forces tether the God-ward elan of a pure soul? Murthi Nayanar was not disparaged by the wicked plans of the hostile foreigner.

As a last resort, the alien king prevented the supply of sandal wood to him. The Nayanar searched in vain for a wood to grind the sandal. But he was not disheartened. "O, Lord, what if sandal wood is not available? Here is my elbow—I shall grind sandal with this—" said his faith.

Lo! Murti Nayanar did apply his elbow to grind sandal on the stone muttering, "Siva, Siva". The skin and bone were torn and worn, blood was gushing out of the hands—still he went on grinding and grinding. Siva's Grace spoke to him at last, words of mercy:

"Stop! stop grinding with your elbow. You have stood the test boldly. The world now knows your firm devotion. The alien who harmed you, has fallen. Take the land from him and rule it yourself. Cultivate God-love in the heart of the nation. Let your service of sandal-offering continue for ever".

Murti Nayanar heard the voice of God and saw His Light in the heart; He hailed the pure Almighty Grace with fervent prayers and lo, the elbow was healed and restored to normalcy. Death punished the wicked alien. He died suddenly.

A hopeful morning dawned and the rising sun brought a happy news—The state elephant was set out to garland the next ruler. Its eyes were tied. It wandered here and there, and at last entered the temple and there garlanded Murti Nayanar steeped in prayer. The masses cheered. The elephant's eyes were then untied. With a thrilling Aum, it lifted the Nayanar and placed him on its back and hurried to the palace. "Long live our King, Murti Nayanar" cried the devout subjects.

The ministers prepared for the coronation of the Nayanar. But the Nayanar openly declared "I can rule over this country only when you relinguish alien faiths and embrace Saivism which is our sublime religion, our traditional creed. The officials obeyed him. All knew now the merits of Saivism and the play of God's Grace. The coronation took place grandly. People wanted to decorate him profusely with golden ornaments. But the Nayanar stopped all shows of vanity and luxury saying, "I am a simple devotee of God's will and your humble servant. Sacred ashes and beads are enough for me. Sacred beads on my tuft are better than a gemmed crown. Let us not go beyond this holy simplicity".

People were surprised at his grand simplicity. Ministers hailed his divine qualities.

Murti Nayanar adored Minakshi and Sundareswarar, invoked their blessings and came round the city upon a decorated elephant. King Murti sat upon the ancient throne of the Pandyas His front shone bright with sacred ashes. He ruled over his kingdom and infused sincere devotion in the heart of his subjects. The Saiva religion got a new impetus.

This Nayanar lived long doing his divine duty until God called him back to His blissful abode.

16. Muruga Nayanar

Pumpugalur is a beautiful village in the Cholanadu smiling green and gold with fertile fields, and flourishing groves and fragrant gardens fed by brimming lakes. The bright ashes on the face of its denizens, were a challenge to night's darkness. Nectar-hymns flowed from the heart of its devotees like honey from bee-kissed flowers. Tears gushed out of the fervent eyes of devotees singing God's glory like streams from hill-fountains.

Muruga Nayanar was a pious devotee of the place. He was wise and learned, a lover of God and a servant of His lovers. He rose at early dawn with prayers, finished his bath, and repaired to flower gardens where he carefully gathered fresh flowers in his basket; humming "Sivamayam! Sivamayam" For he saw Siva smiling in the bosom of blossoms. He gathered flowers from bowers, creepers, plants, trees and tanks. He brought them to the temple. There he sat alone stringing garlands of various hues and varieties. He offered them to God Vardhamaneswarar, the presiding deity of the temple. His heart throbbed with the five-lettered mantra, Namasivaya. His hands wove garlands, his mouth chanted Sivanamam, his heart felt Siva's presence, his mind meditated on Siva and his soul took delight in serving Saints. Tirugnana Sambandar, the leading Saiva Saint appreciated his devotional fervour and stayed often under his hospitable roof. His monastery was the resort of great

Saints like Appar. St. Appar and St. Sambandar loved and blessed him. He was a devout follower of Sambandar whose Thevaram hymns he chanted every day with due fervour. He could not live apart from the Saint. During the marriage of Sambandar at Nallur, a divine light emerged out and enveloped the entire area. Sambandar disappeared into that light and Muruganar too entered the effulgent flame hailing "Aum Sivam, Aum Sivam". He attained at-one-ment with Siva along with Sambandar.

17. Rudra Pasupati Nayanar

Rudram is a powerful Vedic hymn. It hails Siva as the Supreme and accords his Grace on those who chant it. There was a Nayanar at Tiru Talaiyur in the land cherished by Cauveri River. Sacrificial fumes of the place rose to the sky. The honeyed fragrance of its groves filled the atmosphere of song-thrills. There lived in this village, a Saint called Pasupati. He was a deep devotee of Siva. He was a vedic scholar who took pleasure in repeating Rudra and he breathed in that powerful Siva mantra. He used to stand in neck-deep water, hold his hands up in adoration and chant the Rudra mantras. He then donned dried clothes and went to the temple to adore Siva with the same mantra. Day in and day out, he lived, breathed and had his being in the Siva Mantra. Siva's grace descended into him. People called him Rudra-Pasupati Nayanar. He attained final beatitude by dint of Rudra-mantras.

18. St. Nandanar

Imagine a cheri (Harijan quarter) centuries ago, at the petty village of Adanur on the Kolladam bank. Its green luxury flows with milk and honey; but the poor folk who cherish its fields and groves at the sweat of their brows are rotting in a sequestered corner in dark dirty hovels made of mud and palm leaves. Pumpkin creepers cover their tops. Black pots are kept in front of the huts. Harijan damsels sing as they crush and thresh grains at the floor scattered with bones and filth. Children naked and sunburnt, with jingling tinklets, play in the dirt. Dogs bark fighting for bones. Children carry away their pups. Dogs chase them howling and yelling. Crows and eagles quickly snatch away fish and flesh drying there. Mothers lay children on goat skins and lull them to sleep under shady mango trees where drums and horns are hung. These poor folk work hard all day long and forget their tedium in drink and wild dance at night. Their folk-tunes and drum-beats, their jingling feet and tingling bells rend the air. These workers rise up at cock-crow, clean their teeth, pray their guardian deity for the good of their family and go to their duties before the Sun comes to his duty. They are untouchables and a luminous Saint was born among them to set an inspiring example to the whole world.

He was Nandanar otherwise called Tirunalaipovar (Go-the-morrow-man). He was a remarkable child, unlike other children. His mind was engrossed in

God-consciousness. He wistfully gazed at the temple tower and was fascinated by the hidden mystery inside the sanctum of the shrine. Nanda with his group of young devotees obtained a distant view as the temple images were taken in processions.

His imaginative fervour increased with the growth of his age. He was eager to offer what he could, to temples. He was a humble tiller working in fields. He lived a simple life, and gave to temples what he saved. He offered leather and straps to drums, strings for harps and fiddles. With his pious companions, he went to Tiruppungur and came round the temple dancing in ecstasy. He stood in awe at a distance and aspired to have a view of the radiant sanctum of Sivalokanathar. But the stone-bull hid his view. The bells rang, lights were waved, rituals went on; the atmosphere of sacred solemnity awakened in his heart, emotional communion. He daily visited the Sivalokanathar's temple and stood behind the flag-staff struggling to get a view of the Lingam in the sanctum. God was pleased with his spotless fervour and ordered the stone bull to move aside and now Nandan and his friends had a clear view of the sanctum where the Lingam was worshipped. He saw the whole ceremony of worship. He made his heart the sanctum of Siva and began inner worship. Nandanar visited all the temples near his village and cultivated a pious enthusiasm to see more and more of them. He took delight in offering his services to temples. He found a spring and dug a tank near the temple at Tiruppungoor.

One day he heard about the glory of Chidambaram from a pandit who was addressing an audience. Chidambaram means Wisdom-ether-the ethereal space

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of God-consciousness. It is not the material ether of scientists. It is the psychic ether in the Yogin's heart. Chidambaram is the ideal temple, the temple *par-excellence.* Nataraja resplendent in the Hall of wisdom, is the most wonderful anthropomorphic representation of the Divine as He dances in the heart of beings.

Nandan longed to see Nataraja inside the Chidambaram temple. But how? To see Chidambaram was the unique passion of his soul. Day and night it was working in his mind and impelling him forward. "Tomorrow I shall go-Yes, tomorrow" said his resolve. Many tomorrows passed away but his aspiration was yet to be fulfilled. Circumstances made him a dupe of the morrow and he was nicknamed "Go-tomorrow-man". He was self-absorbed.

Trials came on his way. He dared all, crossed the river and ventured into the town and stood before the high-walled temple-gate of Chidambaram. He kept his inner communion ardently. He wept in pious fervour and abandoned himself into the hands of the Divine Grace and prayed "O, Lord, birds and beasts enter Thy temple. Cannot this poor man go in and see Thee!" He went round the temple walls singing and dancing.

The priests wondered at his devotional ecstasy and prayed to Nataraja to have mercy on him. Nataraja appeared in their dream and commanded "Take my devotee into your fold after a bath in the purifying flames lit with Veda mantras and lead him to My Presence". Nandanar had had already a similar dream vision of Nataraja showering His grace on him and ordering him for a holy fire ordeal".

The hopeful dawn brought victory to the longing soul. The fire was lit. Nandan passed through the ordeal cheerfully, for his destiny was in the hands of God. The priests of the temple were dumb with wonder when the Harijan of yesterday was suddenly transformed into a splendour of divine effulgence. He was led into the temple. Nandan came round the shrine and entered the sanctum. Saints showered flowers of blessings on him, chanting the Vedas. St. Nandanar went in like a beautiful bride to his beloved Lord. The priests saw him entering the Sanctum. Suddenly the form of Nandanar disappeared.

The rest was solemn silence. The priests stood dumb with wonder. A few minutes passed and all hailed the Grace of Nataraja and the glory of God-love in Nandanar. Birth and pedigree, caste and creed count for nothing before the sincere love dedicated to the Divine. God takes note not of the skin-deep birth but observes and rewards the soul-deep faith and fervour.

19. Tiru-Kurippu-Thonda-Nayanar

Thondaimandalam is a land of saints, poets, savants, devotees and philanthropists. It consists of the Arcot and Chingleput districts. Kalahasti, Tiru Kazhu Kundram (Eagle hill), Pasur, Tirumullaivoyal and many holy pilgrim centres are in Thondaimandalam. It is a land of peace and plenty abounding in wealth produced in green fields, high hills, wild forests, extensive seas and vast plains. The land flows with milk, honey, juice and with holy hymns. None thinks of evil here, even in dreams. Its majestic capital was the ancient historic city of Kanchipuram famous for its architectural and cultural beauty. It is the splendid city where Uma adored Siva. It is here that Siva taught Agamas to Shakti. Its fertile fields yield rice and cereals just like the mother's breast flowing with milk by the gentle touch of the baby. It is a city of erudite scholars, who are masters of secular and spiritual lores. Its damsels are full of grace and chaste beauty, faithful to their husbands. Saints scholars, heroes, industrialists, merchants, savants and servants do their accustomed duty and all contribute their capacity for the common good. The city is resonant with holy hymns and humming with honey-bees. Flute and vina mingle with sweet voices and fill the city atmosphere with entrancing music. Koils imitate those songs and peacocks dance to their rhythmic tunes. It is a universal city containing all that is good in the world. It is here that Mother Shakti adored Siva according to the Agamas revealed by Him. It is here that Uma

embraced Ekambaranath. Siva and Shakti blessed here all mankind and did thirty-two kinds of benefactions. It is here that Siva-Shakti established the famous Kama-kottam which brought felicity to men and women granting their desires. Many holy tanks were sunk here by the Divine Grace and many gardens laid. Its stately palaces and mansions are happy and auspicious with festive carols and gambols, jingling dances and song-thrills. The pious, the heroic, the business-like and the artistic citizens contribute their all for the good of the commonweal. There is a mystic charm and celestial harmony in the spiritual socialism which is the crowning achievement of its citizens living each for all and all for each. Its good is good for all; its joy is joy for all.

In this famous city lived a pious Washerman a true devotee of God and a ready servant of God-lovers. He volunteered to clean the clothes of any holy man. "Your clothes are dirty Sir, I shall wash them clean, anon," he used to say and he did at once what he said. His instant understanding ability brought him the popular name Tiru Kurippu Thondar—he who serves mankind with an understanding readiness. He used to utter Sivanamam as he washed clothes. He imagined that his past Karmas were being washed off as he removed dirt from the clothes of holy men. God revealed one day to the world the sincerty of this dedicated soul.

He came to the home of the Wash-well-Nayanar (Let us call him so) wearing dirty clothes torn to shreds. The washer-man welcomed Him warmly and offered to clean His clothes. The Hirt in the clothes outweighed the texture.

Nayanar: "Sir, give me your clothes for washing."

Saint: "That is right; but see this is a cold season. I want them to cover my body during the cold evening. You must return them clean before sun-set. Can you do so?"

Nayanar: "I shall try, sir."

Saint: "Delay is dangerous. It will bring on you sin of exposing this old man to chilly weather."

Nayanar: "I shall faithfully do my duty. Let God help me. The Saint gave his clothes and went away."

Wash-well Nayanar applied fullers earth, removed the dirt from the clothes and again bleached it in steam, again washed it and these processes went on till evening. Clouds gathered in the sky and rains poured in torrents. The pious man was drenched and drenched in heavy showers. He could not even see clearly, due to torrential downpours. Twilight gently creeped and yet thunder rains poured and poured. The clothes were cleaned but they could not be dried. "Alas! the Saint will be suffering and shuddering from cold. Ah, I have failed in my duty. I must have carried the clothes home and dried them in time. Alas, I have done wrong! O Lord, I shall hit my head against this stone and shed my blood and die" said he. He did hit his head against the hard stone. But a merciful hand protected his head. The stone became soft like a flower. God lived even in that stone. He was alert and ready to protect the devotee. "Long live, O devotee! you have stood my test!

Behold, up". spoke, His voice from the sky! Lo! the Saintly washerman revelled in the splendid vision of Siva and Uma there, and he heard again Their voice: "Your sincere heart has been revealed to the world. Come to my abode and enjoy eternal bliss". This is the reward of doing one's duty with a spirit of sincere dedication.

20. Chandesa Nayanar

Seignalur is a fertile town on the bank of the Manniaaru in the land of Cholas. Its people were pious, devoted to Siva and they walked the path of Virtue. They were scholars of Vedas and Agamas and taught them to their children. Like moon among stars, they shone amidst students. Like sweetness in milk, light in eyes, melody in songs, rain in clouds, they regarded God-love as the meaning of life and uttered "Siva, Siva" with every breath. It was a spiritually advanced town.

Yaksha Dhattan was the most learned vedic scholar of the place. With his wife Pavira, he lived an ideal life of love, devotion, charity and worship. A divine child was born to these pure souls. He was named *Vicharasarma.* He was a precocious child. He learnt the Vedas in his fifth year and his heart bloomed into psychic love for Siva. His life was fragrant with God fervour. Like scent in buds, the Vedic truth unfolded itself within his heart and permeated his life. He mastered the ancient spiritual lore and lived it in actual life. He esteemed Love of Siva above all and his thought, word and deed were soaked in Siva-consciousness. He was all mercy and compassion. He could not brook any cruelty to animals; for he was conscious of Siva in Jivas, God in all beings.

One day, he observed a herd of cattle going to the grazing meadows. The cowherd was beating a butting mother-cow with a heavy stick. Vichara Sarma plucked

his stick saying, "O, cowherd, why do you beat the innocent cow? The cow gives milk for food, and dung for sacred ashes. A cow is more useful than man. You do not know how to tend it and so I shall treat these cows lovingly. You can go home. I shall lead them to grazing fields and bring them home every evening."

The cowherd ran to his house and Vichara Sarma led the cattle to the grassy meadows and tended them very kindly. Cosmic consciousness was awakened in his soul. He saw the cattle as equal souls. He was more than a mother to those dumb children. He wore a simple codpiece, held a rod and rope in his hand to control his charges. He led the cows early morning to green meadows. He allowed them to graze at pleasure. He played melodious tunes on his flute and the cows drank with their keen ears his entrancing music. After feeding them well, he led them to a pool to drink water and then cleaned their bodies with water. He used to bring fresh grass to calves that were unable to scale heights. He gave them rest under shady trees to chew the cuds. Then he marched them home to the rhythm of his flute voice and the cattle knew their close friend and saviour. They understood his words and gestures and obeyed him. He took his bath in the river, did his prayer and meditation, gathered pipal sticks for *havan* (fire-ceremony) and returned home singing Aum. The cows flourished well and yielded plenty of milk, often in excess. Their udder overflowed with sweet white milk. They remembered gratefully their tender master more than their tender calves.

Vichara Sarma's heart also overflowed with love of Siva. He saw Divine vibrations under an ebony tree on

a sand hill, on the river bank. His meditation went on peacefully there and he had vision of the Divine splendour. At that spot he made a Lingam and began worshipping it ceremonially. He bathed the Lingam with fresh milk and the cows automatically gave milk in profuse quantities, just as the Saint touched their udder. He would not allow any innovation in his worship. A jealous few carried tales to the owners of the cows, that the mystic cowherd was wasting precious milk and they complained in turn to his father Yaksha Dhatta: "Sir, your son took the place of the professional cowherd. Of course he tended the cows carefully. But he pours all the milk on the sand-heap. Come and see his eccentric act, near the river." Dhatta felt angry. The next day he secretly watched his son and interfered.

It was midday. The cows were chewing cuds under the ebony tree. Sarma made a sand Lingam, brought flowers for worship and a pot of milk from the cows that voluntarily milked for him. His eyes were half-closed in deep contemplation.

The angry father ran to his son with a stick and belaboured him crying: "What a havoc, you are doing to the cowsmen! You dare to pour their milk on this sand heap. Fie upon your fool-hardiness!" The Saintly boy cared little for the angry fit of his father. He patiently went on with his holy routine. The impatient father kicked the milk pot with his haughty foot and there the Saint took a sword and cut the feet of the insolent innovator. He fell down crying: "Alas, loss" The Saint was unconscious of what happened. He went on with his holy routine. An aura of divine light

possessed him. He had the vision of Umasivam amidst the hallowed Splendour. A force descended into him. A mystic voice spoke out, "O My lover, you have felled down your father for my sake. I am hence, your father and you are my child. I give you the status of being my Chandesh. You eat what I eat and you wear what I wear, you live as I live. I grant you this Divine freedom."

Siva garlanded the young Saint with the flowers on His tuft. Nature showered upon him, flowers and blessings. "Vive Chandesh!", cried devotees. Yaksha Dhatta now felt his mistake and begged excuse. His legs were healed and everything ended in peace and joy.

Hail Chandesa Nayanar!

21. Appar the Dynamic Saint

Glorious Saint

"We are not weaklings! Fear is not for us;
Subjects we are to none; Eternal bliss is ours!
We are subjects of the Almighty
One, who is nobody's subject."

Such are the bold words sparked out of the dynamic Soul of Saint Appar. Albert Einstein exclaimed regarding Mahatma Gandhi, "Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this, ever in flesh and blood, walked upon this earth." In the same breath, we can declare: "Did such an apostle of God walk among mankind—singing the glory of God and manifesting the Splendour of His Grace by deeds which are beyond words!" He was the Divine Satyagrahi, the forerunner of Gandhi. He was the Light of beatitude, the splendour of divine love, the ocean of heart's abundance, the treasure of practical wisdom, the thrilling example of spiritual heroism that dared the ordeals of fire and ocean. His songs are the symphony of the soul in tune with the Infinite and his words are Gospel-truths of eternity. All saintly virtues and all acts of Devotional fervour are epitomised in Appar's wonderful life of spiritual adventures. He is so simple, so ample, so high, so pure, so profound in knowledge and so glorious in service that the whole humanity can stand up and declare!: "Here is a dynamic Saint, Savant of Truth and servant of mankind." "How can a single tongue mouth his glory?" sings poet Sekkizhar. Now, let us go to the place of his birth.

A holy Land

What is now the South Arcot District was known in those days as Tiru-Munai-padi, a fertile land of shrines, saints, seer-poets and men of noble virtues. It is a land cherished by seven perennial streams-Varaha, Ponnai, Pennar, Gadilam, Upper, Vellar and Manimukta. It is rich in green and golden yields. It smiles for miles and miles with peace and plenty. It is also fragrant with flowers and flowing with milk, juice and honey. The curling fumes of agar rising from its high mansions, perfume the atmosphere. It is a land of feasts and festivities. This is the holy land of the advent of Appar and Sundarar, the two immortal Lights of Saivism. Sundarar was born at Navalur and Appar at Amur. Tiru Amur, five miles from Panruti, is a holy centre of spiritual vibrations. Its peaceful atmosphere is resonant with dulcet tunes of holy hymns and inspiring concerts and jingling with ecstatic dances.

A Dauntless Pilgrim

In this village of virtuous inhabitants, there lived a fervent devotee of God. He was *Pugazhanar*, famous for his learning and hospitality. He hailed from the lineage of Korukaiyar's, noted for its love of God and God-lovers. Pugazhanar's wife was the sweet and chaste Madiniar, who adored her husband as God. Guests felt happy under their hospitable roof. The homeless found their home in their mansion. The hungry found their door always open. Their daughter, Tilakavati was a paragon of feminine grace, beauty and chaste virtue. Their dear son Marul-Nikki (dispeller of ignorance), was a rare prodigy of culture, character and comely manners, bold in upholding the absolute

Truth at any cost. He was a dauntless pilgrim of divinity with a gloomy past and hopeful future. Marulnikki pored over sacred books of all religions and was equal-minded.

Destiny Changes

Destiny changed the course of his life suddenly. Pugazhanar arranged for the marriage of his daughter with an army-chief—a lion in the field who was well known as *Kali-Pagaiyar*, enemy of the evil-force. The proposal was confirmed. But unhappy events came in succession to change the destiny of the pious family. The chola king sent commander Kalipagaiar to quell an aggressive enemy from the North. Kalipagai led an army and met bravely the hostile invader in a fierce battle. He gave his life to bring victory for his king's flag. Before the news reached home it was overclouded by dark calamities. Pugazhanar died suddenly. His chaste wife followed him. The arrows of sorrows pierced the morrows of the orphaned daughter and son. Thilakavati, a girl of twelve could not bear existence after the death of the hero who was to wed her. She ran for a chaste suicide. The wise brother Marulnikki protested and declared that he too would follow her steps to commit suicide. The tender sister retraced her steps and dedicated herself to an austere life at home.

Dharmasena

The veil of Death opened her brother's heart to go in search of what was everlasting. He set no value upon transitory things. He gave up wealth and home. He distributed all his possessions among the poor. He

sank wells, made tanks, planted groves, built inns and provided for public causes all his ancestral properties. He gave liberally whatever learned scholars needed. He contemplated over the teachings of great saints and the non-violence of the Jain Saints attracted him most. His heart abhored cruelty and twined to Tatvarta Sutra insisting upon Ahimsa. Jainism enjoyed the royal favour in those days. Kanchipuram and Pataliputram (Tiru-pathiri-puliyur) were the political and religious capitals of the Jain Kingdom raised by the Pallavas, who were patrons of the alien faith. Marul-nikki embraced the popular Jainism and joined the monastic brotherhood at Tirupathiripuliyur. He joined the Jaina College there and mastered Tatvarta Sutras, Panchastikaya, Sapta bhangi and other Jain works. His learning and ascetic virtues raised him day by day to the high position of a high priest. The Jains accepted him as their great Master and called him Dharmasena. While the brother was enjoying here the glory of being a Digambar-Jain—Master, let us see what the sister did.

The Sister Prays

Sister Tilakavati renounced home and world and repaired to Tiru Adhikai Virattanam five miles from Amur where she dedicated herself to the service of the temple of Siva. She swept the temple precincts, smeared the floor, gathered fragant blossoms, wove fine garlands for the Deities and prayed God silently with all the fervour of her soul, for the return of her brother :

"O Lord of my soul, my sole refuge, Thou art the unique one, omnipotent, omnipresent. Thou knowest

everything. Thou art enthroned in my heart. Knowest not Thou, the aching pain there? My dear brother, Marulnikki has gone astray. He has left Thy feet to sit among Jains as their master. But why should he leave Thy religion, O, Siva, the religion for all, a synthetic and practical religion that solves the riddles of existence? It leads to Godhood, the human soul enmeshed in the mental-vital-physical tangles. Should my brother deny Thee and live among men who do not accept Thy Divine Supremacy? Through Thy manifesting force, Thy radiating Energy, Thy Will projects itself into the mass of becomings. Hail Immutable Ordainer, this world of multiplicity is a mutation of Thyself-delight. It is a delight to live in Thy consciousness and dedicate my soul to Thy temple-service. Bring my brother back to his native God-centric religion of Bhakti which comprises of Charya (moral purity) Kriya (devotion to God), Yoga (inner communion) and Jnana (God-knowledge). The time is ripe, O Lord, that you create a transformation in my brother and bring him back to serve Thy will and hold high the standard of Saivism. Ring in Godliness, O, Temple bells and ring out anti-god movements? Take your field, O Siddhanta and rout out alien innovations. Bring peace and hope to my pining heart, O. Grace I take utter refuge in Thy Power!"

Redemption

The Lord of beings heard the fervent prayer of Tilakavati and told her in her dream: "Be happy! Your brother was an ascetic in previous birth striving to attain Me. He shall be redeemed and reclaimed by a painful test now". Tilakavati thanked Siva and kept on praying for the redemption of her brother.

Patalipuram Jain monastery is gloomy with sorrow. Master Dharmasena is suffering from excruciating colic torture and his life-bird is fluttering for an escape from the mortal cage Doctors administer remedies; priests are applying prayers and incantations in the name of Aruhantas and Siddhas. Some of them try magic cures. Nothing could prevail and Dharmasena was struggling with death when the sister's memory came. That stunned awake his soul and the thoughts of Siva flashed in his mind which was saying goodbye to Jainism.

He sent information through his cook to Tilakavati. She prayed God for his relief but would not go to him. It was dark midnight; the monastery was asleep. Dharmasena threw off his jain robes, put on pure white clothes and quickly escaped, supported, by a faithful escort. Fifteen miles were fast covered and Nature smiled a golden welcome to him as he saluted his holy sister.

Song Cures

"Come, my brother; reborn in Siva-consciousness," said the angelic sister as she gave him sacred ashes with mantra, Namasivaya. He wore the holy ashes and felt a thrill of peace. She pitied his agony, treated him kindly and led him to the temple of Siva in the crimson dawn and a new light dawned in him. As the Light was smiling in the sky, hope was rising in his heart. He smeared his body with holy ashes, went round the temple, stood before the sanctum solemnly and prostrated before Siva. Hymns surged his heart's emotion and he found his redemption in his hymnal appeal to God's Grace. The Devarams (hymnal wreaths) of

Appar are Tamil mantras which carry their effect even today. This is the first popular Devaram that was inspired in his soul:

"I have committed cruel sins, O Lord of mercy, deign to remove the killing pain which I suffer thereby. I shall hence dedicate my days to ceaseless prayers at Thy feet which have given me merciful refuge. My belly and bowels are wrung with anguishing pain. I appeal to thy mercy to appease me, O Lord of Virattanam, on the bank of the Gadilam river".

Miracle! The pain ceased as he sang, "Thee, I have enthroned in my heart and my mind never ceases from Thy thought. But let not this venemous pain afflict me anymore. Bless me and say "Fear not. I'm with Thee", O Lord of Virattanam!

Tiru-Navukkarasu

The colic pain was no more for him and the first test was over. A voice was heard in the air, "Sweet are Thy hymns, O my lover. We call you Vagisa-Tirunavuk-karasu, the king of the tongue." Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar, so let us call him, ejaculated his emotion of gratitude! "O Saviour Siva, my joy transcends words. Thou hast flooded my soul with boundless grace. Thou singest Thy Truth in the hush of my surrendered heart. My cosmic life swims lightly in the luminous love of Thy ocean grace!"

"How foolish was I before, to deny Thee, O God! It is to deny the sun during the bright day, to deny the air that gives me breath. It is to eat sour fruit when the honeyed juice of sweet fruits is at hand. It is to

milk a dry cow in the dark and warm oneself in the twinkling firefly. It is to beg in a barren village. It is to bite hard steel rejecting the soft sugarcane. There is no world, no soul, no life, no body without the will of the unique One-God."

"O God, Thou hast showered Thy Grace on me, redeemed me from the inferno of dark lies! Blessed is the colic pain that has after all, helped me to regain my place at Thy Saviour-feet!" St. Tirunavukkarasu breathed his love and faith in heart-melting hymns; devotees got them by heart and sang them. Devout hearts hailed his glory everywhere he went. "Hail Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar, Saint Seer, poet, king of words, lord of hymns! Thy life has revealed the glory of God! Salutations, inspired Poet-Saint!"

Song and Service

Aspirants followed him and listened to his teachings. But the Saint was simple and humble. He never took airs nor declared himself as a manifestation. He felt his human level which was raised to Sainthood by the Divine Grace. Song and Service went hand in hand with his daily routine.

He had a small hoe for cutting grass and cleaning the path for the devotees to come round the temple. He swept the floor. Service was his body and song was his soul!

"Plough truth; sow aspiration; weed out untruth; arise with patience; watch the self; fence it with spiritual dignity; follow righteousness. The Jiva attains thereby the fruit of Sivahood." Thus he taught aspirants often and lived peacefully in God-consciousness

at Virattanam. Let us now go to the Jain monastery.

Bring the Renegade

There was a hell of confusion at Tirupadiripuliyur monastery. Dharmasena has escaped! He pretended colic pain! O he has betrayed us! Alas he has doffed his pontificals and donned ashes and rosaries. He has laid down the bunch of peacock feathers. He has discorded all injunctions of our faith. He has insulted our creed! His sister has spoiled him. He is no more a Jain. He is a renegade! He has reverted to Saivism! Danger! Come, let us complain to our king, Mahendravarman. Make haste to Kanchi!"

Thus the Jain monks made haste to Kanchi and proferred a loud complaint before the king who was a Jain:

"A catastrophe has fallen on us, O King. Dharmasena has betrayed our confidence and has escaped to a temple to embrace Saivism. The deserted must meet capital punishment or our faith will lose its prestige."

"Bring that turncoat traitor before me soon" ranted the angry king, as he despatched his minister for the purpose.

We Are Subjects Of God

The Pallava minister hastened to Virattanam and served the royal order. "The king wants you at once," said the minister. The king of tongue replied: "We have nothing to do with the king, no favour to seek".

The minister demanded, "you live in his land. Are you not his subject?"

The Saint sang a powerful reply which is in every body's mouth now:

"Subjects we are to none. Death we fear not. Hell we suffer not. We are not weaklings. We feel happy; we know not disease. We are serfs to none.

"We are servitors of the king of beings who has no king above him. He is not bound by anything. Sankara, the king of kings wearing white chanks in His ears. We are His and we take refuge at His lotus feet."

The minister and the royal messengers solicited further and hence the Saint condescended to go with them to Kanchipuram, the Pallava capital.

The Daring Soul

The spiritual king now faces the mere political king. Courage is written on his face. Let the sky fall, the earth quake, the hill upset, the surging sea dry to the bottom; let the sun be blown up; let the untoward happen, the heart dedicated to the unique one shall not quail. This was the spirit of the daring soul as he faced the king's wrath:

King: Dharmasena, yesterday we paid our homage to your ascetic virtues and learning. Today you have betrayed us, spurned the high place we gave you and fled away to your sister's faith. Why?

Saint: For that is my faith; that is my God-centric creed.

King: My faith, my creed! My belief in Mahavir-do you deny it?

Saint: Mahavira may be great; God is the greatest truth. I simply followed the truth. No God: no world, no soul, no man, no king.

King: Shall I cut off your impertinent tongue?

Saint: Then I shall adore my God in my heart.

King: If I take off your heart?

Saint: You cannot take away my consciousness. I will adore my God with my hands.

Kiug: If I chop off your hands?

Saint: I will come round his Sanctum with my feet.

King: If the legs are felled?

Saint: I will roll my body round his temple?

King: If I cut your body to pieces?

Saint: Then I shall open inner communion with God in the soul!

King: God in the Soul! Has he no Death?

Saint: No; God is immortal, ever united to the soul.

King: Cannot I burn him to Death?

Saint: Nothing can destroy God in the Soul which is my Reality.

Jains: Then let him face the burning kiln.

King: Then, throw him into the burning kiln for a week. Let me see if the God in him survives this torture.

Fire Cannot Burn Faith

The ruffian soldiers carried away the dauntless Saint of God and threw him into the burning embers of the kiln. Ah cruel, cruel fanatic fit of a king. Is this the religion of Ahimsa he boasts of?

A week passed; the king sent his assassins to bring the ashes of the Saint. But lo! The Saint was there singing Nama-Sivaya!

The soldiers brought him before the King!

King: Did not the fire scorch you? How did you feel the kiln?

Saint: Nothing can destroy God's messenger. The kiln was cool like the evening moon. I heard in it a humming harp. Its hot flames were like fanning south-breeze, like the vernal grove, like a lotus tank swarming with Auming honey-bees, for I felt in the kiln a soothing shelter. I felt the feet of my Almighty God.

The priests charged him with sorcery and magic.

King: You have applied some magic against the test of fire. Tell me, what incantation you have learnt.

Saint: Nama-Sivaya that is my wisdom; that is my learning. These five sacred letters Na-ma-si-va-ya have shown me a felicitous path. Hence my tongue is soaked in the sweetness of that great mantra of my God Siva.

King: Where is your God? Can you show Him to me?

Saint: Who am I to show you God! He is there in all beings-in you and I, like fire in the wood which bursts out by rubbing. He is there like butter in the milk which manifests itself on churning. Establish inner communion and churn it with conscious meditation. God shall reveal His bliss in your heart.

King: Does not your God die?

Saint: He is the one who spurned Death. The Devas once churned the milk-ocean. Deadly poison came up. Its very odour could kill all. Our God Siva gulped up the poison to save all from Death.

King: God gulped up poison and did not die. Can you also do likewise?

Saint: Nilakanta's will shall prevail! Aum Nilakantam!

Poison Does Not Kill

King: Then give him strong poison. Let us see the power of his Nilakanta.

The cruel assassins gave him a deadly poison mixed in milk food. The Saint drank it but the poison did not kill him. He was singing:

"I shall not breathe even a moment forgetting Him who has his temple in the heart of Thinkers—the mighty Lord who tore and wore the tusker's skin—"

The report went to the king. His Conscience tortured him and yet he made another challenge against

the Divine Will. "Did he sing on the Tusker—tearer. Then set against him our elephant. Let it crush him to death," said the King.

Rutty Tusker Bows

The rutty royal elephant was incited against him. The bold saint imagined Ganapati in the elephant and sang:

"Nothing frightens me; fear is not for me; I am a devotee of Him who wears the tusker's skin. Hail Ganapati in the tusker". Lo, the royal tusker humbly saluted him with its trunk, came round him and prostrated at his feet, crying Aum, Aum! The elephant made an angry attack on the enemies who, with bated breath, ran for life.

The king was nonplussed and his conscience warned him again against playing with fire and yet false prestige tried its last game of arrogant vanity.

Stone—Boat

The Saint was bound to a heavy stone and cast into the stormy sea. But lo, the stone floated him ashore like a boat as he sang:

"Na-ma-si-va-ya! That is my unique help, unique strength against a world of trials and tribulations. Even the stone bound to my neck becomes a saviour-boat by the efficacy of that five-lettered-mantra—which adorns my tongue just as lotus adorns a tank and justice a king. No evil can put me down when faith hails this great mantra Na-ma-si-va-ya!"

Sekkizhar beautifully explains this miracle: "People are bound by dualities to the stone of the triple stains,

ego, lust and evil. They are flung into the sea of worldliness. But Gods's Grace saves them just as they utter Na-ma-si-va-ya. There is no wonder that His mantra saved the saint stone-bound and sea-flung. The five lettered mantra can save us from a world of torturing evils".

Unseen Helper

There is internal evidence in the hymns of the Saint to prove the verity of these trials. The place where Tirunavukkarasar landed is today known as Karai-yeru-vitta-kuppam (the village which landed the Saint). It is near mount Capper. His sister and devotees who were anxiously waiting ashore, raised a thundering ovation, "Hara Hara Mahadeva, Aum Siva Aum" as the Saint touched the shore. All, including the misled king, wondered how the Saint stood victoriously all these trials. To them the great Saint of Grace calmly sang out his heart: "He is my mother, my father, my sister; He created the three worlds. He resides in my heart and I think of him always. He has taken my responsibility —He, the beloved of the celestials, the Lord of Tirupadiripuliyur. He is the unseen Helper, impersonal Saviour of loving devotees"

To take refuge at the feet of God brings salvation and that is the secret of the Saint's conquering might.

King Surrenders

King Mahendravarma repented for the tortures inflicted on the Saint and now knew the Divine Grace which protected the God-lover. He was moved by the patient suffering of the pure pious Saint. He now

believed in Siva and turned a Saiva. He pulled down the Jain monastery and built a new temple for Siva near Virattanam when he surrenderd to Vagisar. This temple was known as Gunadhara Isvaram. The king became a sincere follower of the Saint.

I'm Ever Thine, O Supreme !

The Saint went to Virattanam where he was grandly received by God-lovers. The town and the temple were specially decorated with festoons and welcome arches. Fragrant flowers were strewn on his path. Bards sang his glory as the heroic saviour of Saivism.

The Nayanar appeared amidst an ocean of hailing devotees like a moving splendour of Divine Grace. His golden body was shining with pure white ashes. His thoughts were immersed at the feet of Siva. His heart was melting with the love of the Lord and pouring into tears of sacred fervour. His mouth was humming hymns in praise of the Almighty one. People felt themselves blessed at the sight of such a sage; but they wondered how a human being could have the heart to torture such a Saint of love and mercy! The Saint stood before the Sanctum of Siva and sang thrilling hymns in which he said "Poor me! I denied and despised Thee, O Lord, in those ignorant days. How mercifully Thou hast manifested Thy glory in my life. I am ever Thine, O Supreme".

Pilgrim Of God

The name and fame of Tirunavukkarasar spread far and wide and pilgrim centres and temples eagerly awaited his visit. Spiritual resurgence followed his

steps. His very name infused faith and devotion and changed the agnostic gloom pervading in the land. With a group of devotees, he walked from temple to temple and adored God with his melodious song-offerings. His songs worked miracles. He visited about two hundred temples and a hundred and twenty-four temples were immortalised by his hymns. Pure devotees met him on the way and served his holy mission with zeal and zest. He visited temples of South Arcot, Tanjore, Tiruchirapalli, Madurai, Tirunelveli and Ramnad Districts and went North to Tiruvannamalai, Kanchi, Kazhuk Kundram, Vanmiyur, Mylapore, Ottriyur, Kalahasti, Sri Sailam, Kasi, etc. offering to the Divine the out pourings of his heart. We will follow the Saint to some dynamic centres where his hymns made history.

Hail Nataraja

The pilgrimage started from Tiruvathigai. The Saint was solemnly received at Tiruvennai-Nallur, Tirukovilur, Pennadakam and there in the temple known by the name *Thoonganai Madam*, forty miles from Padiripuliyur, the Saint prayed God for the expiation of his sins by impressing upon his shoulders the marks of Siva's trident and bull. A Divine Spirit impressed them and the Saint felt himself purified. His reconversion to Saivism was thus ratified by the Divine Will. Thence he went to Virudhachalam and other shrines and then to Chidambaram the temple of temples, the foyer of Saivism and the centre of spiritual dynamism sung by a galaxy of Saints. Covering an area of about forty acres, it stands a monument of India's spiritual splendour. The God dancing in the heart of beings is represented here as Nataraja, so inspiring to see and adore. The sanc-

tum of Chidambaram symbolises the psychic cave, cave of the heart where God, the supreme yogi, resides to grant peace and bliss to all sincere seekers.

Tiru-navuk-karasar was grandly welcomed at Chidambaram by the priests and the public. The Koels cooed and peacocks danced in delight. The whole town of green groves and high mansions was jubilant with the joy of seeing a divine Saint. They raised an ovation and songs of adoration gushed out of their souls! The whole town reverberated with voices singing "Siva Siva, Hara Hara! Hail Vagisa! Hail King of sacred hymns! Hail holy Sage! Hail daring Saint that has stood the torturing tests of alien faiths and upheld the banner of Saivism.

Vagisa was all love, all fervour, all emotion. His hands were raised in adoration above his head. His eyes were raining tears of love, ceaselessly! His heart was melting with fervour. His body often prostrated to Nataraja, the God of cosmic dance. With limitless ecstasy Vagisa stood before him and his soul was pouring out hymns of entrancing rapture:

"No more birth, no more return to mortality, The Grace of Nataraja, the cosmic Dancer, has possessed me in the auspicious Tillai of beauty and plenty. No more suffering, no more bondage of deeds! Nothing affects me, for I am bound to the feet of the boundless Grace. I have bathed my being in His Light and my past sins have been atoned.

Hail Nataraja

"He is rare for imagination; He is the consciousness in Vedic seers. He is the heart of the Vedas. He is

subtler than an atom. His reality is unknown to mere intellectuals. He is sweet like milk and honey in the heart of lovers. He is the splendour of splendours, the Lord of celestials. He is Vishnu who protects and Brahma who creates. Fire, Air, roaring Sea, lofty mountain peak. He towers above all these—the Greatest Truth, the Lord of Puliyur. Those days are empty and nonexistent when I do not hail His glory.—Hail Nataraja !"

Vagisa remained at Chidambaram and its surrounding places like Vedkalam for a long time singing the glory of God and working with his hoe removing thorns and brambles and making paths smooth for devotees. "As Thy devotee, I sing Thy glory; not only that, I take delight in doing useful service to Thy devotees", sang the practical Saint.

Hail Appar !

St. Vagisa, then left for Sirkazhi to see the gifted child Jnanasambandar whose name was widely known. At the age of three years, this child cried for God who fed him with the milk of His Grace. Jnanasambandar got thereby all knowledge and the gift of singing. His songs worked wonders. The news of the coming of the aged Saint reached the Divine child. Sambandar was overjoyed. He set out with his followers and with temple honours, to welcome the Saint who stood boldly, the trials and tortures inflicted on him by the king of Kanchipuram.

St. Vagisa, after worshipping Nataraja and Siva at Naraiyur, reached Sirkazhi. St. Sambandar warmly welcomed him and hailed him, "O Father, Appar" and

embraced him while the aged Vagisa saluted the child saying "I am thy humble servitor—Adiyen—the servitor of Saiva in you. It was a heart-melting scene—caste and creed disappeared; the difference of age and pedigree melted away. Two hearts united in the soul, to serve God who was beyond birth, and pedigree. They lived in each other for the good of all and people hailed this unity as a blessing to the growing influence of Saivism. From that day, the name *Appar* became more popular than Vagisar or Tirunavukkarasar. Marul-nikkiyar and Dharmasenar were already names forgotten. Tirunavukkarasar or Vagisar, the name given by God, was superseded by the endearing name Appar, given by the inspired child of God, to the brave man of God. They united like seas of love and grace. They were the head and heart of Saivism. They were the two eyes of wisdom. Their songful souls met and won over the wrongful evils of the time spirit and brought laurels to Truth and Light of Divinity.

Both the Saints, the younger and the elder, adored the tower and entered the temple at Sirkali. Sambandar requested Appar to sing and the later immortalised his visit with a heart-melting song in which he hailed the almighty Grace of God that protected devout souls even against the flood of times. Sambandar and Appar lived together for a few days and then Appar went forward to visit the temples on the banks of the Kauveri. Sambandar accompanied Appar up to Kolakka and gave him a happy send off to meet again for the Divine service.

St. Appar visited a number of holy places on the banks of the Kauveri. After offering his songs at

Punkoor, Nidur, Myladu Turai, Velvikudi, Idaimarudur, Pazhai-Arai and Sattimutram, he reached Tiru Avadu-Turai where he stayed a few days singing varieties of songs in praise of God. It is the place of the great Mulayogin, the author of Tirumandiram. Thence he continued his pilgrimage and reached Sattimutram where he prayed: "O Lord, before Death overtakes me, be pleased to plant on my head Thy lotus feet so that my life shall be purified! The Lord commanded him to go to Nallur where he placed His blessed feet upon Appar's head and the Divine force descended into him thereby. Appar stayed at Nallur for a few days offering to God immortal wreaths of hymns which are blossoms of his psychic love for God. "My Good God of Nallur was good enough to place on my head his cool lotus feet" sings Appar.

The heart of Appar was melting with love and gratitude for the gracious God at Nallur which is a very important centre of his long pilgrimage. He visited the place again and again and dedicated thrilling songs to Siva in its temple. After visiting several other places he came to *Thingalur*, nine miles from Tanjore.

Appudi Adigal

There lived in Thingalur a holy Saint known as Appudi Adigal. He was an ideal Brahmin, an equal-minded devotee, a generous-hearted gentleman, a passionate lover of Tirunavukkarasar. He remembered always the sacrifices which Appar made for Saivism and the soul melting hymns sung by him. His very mantra was *Vagisaya Namaha*. His home, garden, tank, well, ins, water-sheds the charitable institutions set up by him, his sons and all things around him even

his cattle were named after Tirunavukkarasar. Appar noted with surprise the charitable institutions on the way bearing his name. Appudi was delighted to meet his Master Appar before his very door. The impersonal love cherished by the great public benefactor, increased tenfold by personal contact. The Brahmin who tended fire daily, welcomed Appar into his mansion. The whole family adored his feet and a rich feast was prepared for the Saint of Saints. The Saint was meditating in a cosy corner.

Raising The Dead

Appudi sent his eldest son, the elder Tirunavukkarasu to bring plantain leaves from his garden. But alas! a cobra bit him as he cut the leaf. The boy ran home with the leaf, handed it to his mother and fell dead at her feet. The cobra poison killed the eldest son of the host. The fond parents hid their tears, hid the corpse of their son in a secret corner and then invited Appar for the feast. Appar felt the home agloom with some mishap. "Call your eldest son" he requested the host. The benign host humbly requested Appar to take food saying "The elder Tirunavukkarasu will not be available." The Saint now knew the calamity that befel the home. Death revealed itself. Appar made the parents bring the dead boy before the local temple. There he sang a powerful song. The unique One, the merciful Siva who swallowed the ocean-poison to save the celestials, who saved Appar himself from poison, that almighty Saviour saved the son of Appudi. The son rose up as if from sleep. Appar applied holy ashes on his front and blessed him. All were happy now and the whole house

dined with Appar. The resurrection of the boy promoted faith and God-love in the heart of all men. Appar praised Appudi's generosity in a hymn. The pride of caste and creed vanished before the equal-visioned Light of love and grace. The Saint took leave of Appudi and other admirers to continue his holy pilgrimage. He stayed for a few days at Tiru-pazhanam and then reached Tiru-Arur after visiting temples on the way.

At Arur

The Saint who overcame the ordeals of fire and poison was given a grand reception by the public of Arur. Arur is a great Saivite Centre and St. Sundarar, later on lived here. Manu-niti-Cholan ruled over it. Appar dedicated to the local deity Thyagaraja Sivam, his best hymns which are sung daily by devotees. Tears of spiritual ecstasy, rolled down to his chest. His tongue was singing nectar-hymns of devotional fervour. His mind was absorbed in adoring Siva's lotus feet; hands were cutting grass and cleaning the path for devotees; song and service as usual characterised his stay in the holy Arur.

"Come, O heart, if you desire for a life rooted in the Divine - consciousness, worship Siva in the temple of Arur every day. Go there in the crimson dawn, clean and smear the precincts, weave garlands of fresh flowers, prostrate before God, dance in ecstasy singing, "Hail Sankara, Jai Sankara, the ancient God with Ganges on the tuft." Sing "Hara Hara!"

"Hail the Lord of Arur, O mind, if you want your sins to be absolved, if you want light leading to

higher evolution and if you want to surpass the effect of deeds that grip your life. Hail the Supreme Divine of Arur saying "O Lord, Thou art my sole refuge, my luminous guide. I have no companion except Thee, O, Grace, to guide my destiny. The Lord of sun-like effulgent form, dwells in the heart of lovers—Ah, how I suffered during the days when I ignored Him! This maid mind, heard His name before and then His nature and then she heard about Arur where he resides. She became mad after him. She renounced home, father, mother; she relinquished everything and took utter refuge at His Feet."

Such was the Divine fervour with which Appar loved Arur-Sivam! He was delighted to see the festival procession of Vidividanga - peruman—the merciful God of Tiru-Arur.

The Two Meet

Then he went to Tiruppugalur and St. Sambandar met him again and with his entourage gave him a cordial welcome. Both of them stayed under the hospitable roof of St. Muruganar; Appar expressed his great delight in adoring the God at Arur, the beautiful city of divine splendour. Sambandar repaired to Arur while Appar went on his evangelistic tour to Chengattangudi, Nallaru, Tirumarugal and other places and returned to Tirupugalur. Jnana-Sambandar who had already returned from his pilgrimage to Tiru-Arur welcomed again the aged Appar and both lived as usual in the monastery of Muruganar. Two more Saints joined them there-Siruthondar and Nila-Nakkar. Appar and Sambandar united like two seas and delighted in the service of the Lord who wore moon

on his high tuft. How joyful was this company of Saints, dedicated to the service of God and His Truth!

Appar and Sambandar, then moved forward to Ambarmanagar and then to Tirukadavur where they stayed in the monastery of Kungilia Kalaya Nayanar. Thence, they visited Tiru-Vizhi Mizhalai, six miles from Kuttalam.

Famine—Relief

"Approach Him, O mankind, who dwells in the temple of Mizhalai—He whose cloak is the war-tusker's skin, and who wears for his raiment the tiger's skin. He is the sun, moon, earth, fire, water, ether and the souls. He burnt the triple city of ego, lust and envy. They fall into evil path who do not take refuge in Him", sang Appar.

A new test came to these Saints. Rains failed in the land; rivers went dry; crops failed and there was severe famine everywhere. Draught and dearth and dreary atmosphere impeded the progress of the spiritual messengers. Hunger and thirst underminded the spiritual enthusiasm of their followers. They expected a miracle and a miracle took place. Appar and Sambandar prayed to God to protect them from the famine. God in His mercy told in their dreams, "Hard times have affected your minds. Your followers are depressed by hunger: find on the pedestal East and West gold coins placed for each one of you and keep devotees above want."

Yes, God placed for them the coin (Padi Kasu) on the pedestals. The coin meant for Appar was atonce

changed ; but the coin for Sambandar needed Vasi, discount. Both of them fed devotees and carried on their divine work freely. By their prayers and meditations, better days dawned; rains poured again, fields gave good yields and famine ceased.

Veda-Doors Open

Now Appar and Sambandar went to the Vedavanam—temple. The main gate of the inner temple remained closed, since the olden days when the Vedas worshipped Siva there. None could open them. Devotees had to go through the side ways. St. Sambandar desired Appar to sing the door open. Appar sang the hymn that swang the door open. Hundreds of devotees were watching the miracle.

"O Consort of music-voiced Uma, Lord of the Veda-forest, circumambulated by people of the world, swing open the door, so that all can see Thee directly; pray have the mercy to open this door," sang Appar.

When Appar sang the tenth verse of the decade appealing to God's mercy, the doors flew open and all devotees cheered the act of the Saint. They entered the main entrance and had direct vision of the Lord. St. Sambandar sang a hymn to close it: "O Lord adored by the Vedas, close the doors now easily." The door closed. Now the ingrees and egrees were easy for all. This may also mean that the doors of Vedic knowledge were thrown open to all, for, the mission of St. Sambandar was to give a new impetus to the Vedic lore and Saiva Cult and to a new spiritual awakening to mankind. The opening of the doors was delayed in the case of Appar and the closing was quick when Sambandar

breathed one verse. Why? This was rankling and festering in the mind of Appar when the Luminous One appeared in his dream and said "Go ahead to Voimur."

Appar obeyed the Divine call and set out atonce to Voimur. The Luminous One, led him on from a distance and disappeared into the temple. Appar stood aghast, when Sambandar joined him. He too wanted to see that Luminous One who vanished into the temple. Appar prayed, "O Lord, show yourself unto him who closed the Vedic door in one verse, whereas I had to sing ten."

The Dancing Light was visible to Sambandar who showed the same to Appar. Now the riddle was solved and both the Saints sang several hymns to the God of Tiruvoimur, stayed there for a few days and returned to Vedaranyam—Vedavanam, known as Tirumarai kadu.

Madurai Calls

During this time messengers from the queen and the chief minister of the Pandyan King; paid their homage to Appar and Sambandar. They invited St. Jnanasambandar to Madurai to re-establish Saivism which was tottering and flickering for want of royal sympathy on one side, and due to the upsurgence of Jainism on the other side. Every religion is fundamentally good. The basic truth of all religions is love of God and service of mankind. Religions are one in spirit but they differ in forms and names. Religions built around personalities divide humanity. A God-Centric religion unites all, for God is one in all. Saivism is a strongly God-Centric Religion. It is the most ancient religion of man. The impact of alien faith affected the growth of Saivism in

the Pandyan Kingdom. The queen *Pandimadevi*, humbly, requested St. Sambandar to visit Madurai and work for the revival of Saivism. The minister Kulachirai too endorsed the request. The bold boy-Saint, Sambandar felt it a call divine, and at once started to follow the messengers to Madurai; but Appar dissuaded him from going to Madurai dominated by Jainism. He gave his own experience, the tortures that he suffered at their hands. "I shall go and put down the dominant alien faith and uphold our Saivism" asserted Appar. "This is God's command. Allow me to obey. Anon I go to Madurai. Despite day and times, the Divine mission conquers - I dare forward," said St. Sambandar.

Appar Fasts

St. Sambandar went to Madurai saying "Every day is Good on which we undertake God's service. He is there to protect us" Appar bid him good journey and turned to his mission. He visited Nagai, Mizhalai, and Avadu-Thurai. Here he referred in a hymn about the thousand gold pieces accorded by the Divine Will to St. Sambandar. At Pazhaiyarai there was a temple called Vadatali. Appar went to adore Siva there. But the Jains hid the image somewhere. Appar would not touch food until he touched the feet of God in the temple. God appeared in the King's dream and revealed where the image was hid by the Jains. The king at once discovered it, brought it and installed it in the Sanctum and arranged for a grand ceremonial worship. Appar was delighted to see and adore the image of Siva singing "Who can hide Thee, O Lord, who art omnipresent!" After worship and song-offering, Appar broke his fast. He stayed at Pazhaiyarai for a few days and continued his pilgrimage.

God Gives Food

Appar visited Anaika, Tiruchirapalli, Thiruparaiturai and was going to Paingili. The sun was hot; the Saint was tired; he was thirsty. He was worn out with fatigue. The pinch of hunger was terrible. Yet he staggered on with a will to see God in the temple. The merciful Divine, came as a way-farer and brought him into a cool grove. There, an old man beckoned him, made him sit by his side, and gave him a packet of tasteful food saying kindly, "You are tired, holy Sir, eat this, drink water from this tank, take rest and proceed on."

After a sumptuous repast and pleasing rest, the hospitable stranger demanded Appar "Sir, where do you go?" "To yon Paingili" replied Appar. "Then come" said the mystic companion. They went together talking usefully. But the stranger vanished as the temple at Paingili came to sight. "How merciful Thou art, O Divine Master," exclaimed Appar!

Appar, stayed there for a few days singing and serving and then reached Tiru-Annamalai. He adored and went round the Arunagiri and sang "O Lord, unequalled Master, give me refuge at Thy feet. Thou art the Light of my life!"

Northward Tour

Appar is now an old man, but still bold, daring the heat and cold of existence. He crossed hills and dales, dens and glens, plains and forests alone, and sang in temples on the way. He lived upon what chance brought him. From Ottur he reached Kanchipuram, the place of his trials and sacrifices. But the Pallava

capital was entirely transformed. People came in thousands, jubilant to welcome him. The city was beautifully decorated with festoons of leaves and flowers and wreaths and arches. People hailed him as the "Saviour of Saivism and the Spiritual hero who faced daringly, torturous trials to uphold the bull banner and the five-lettered mantra Na-ma-si-va-ya. He dedicated soul-stirring hymns on Ekambara, the impersonal helper of devotees. Appar Sang that Siva was always in his heart and bright before his vision. The people of Kanchi received him with chain-lights and auspicious, pots under ornamental pandals. They took him in grand procession, singing his Thevarams melodiously. He was humble, simple, loving, courteous with a gentle word for every one. "Have faith in Hara; remember Him in everything" said he. Song and Service were his daily routine in all places.

Towards Kailas

From Kanchi, Appar walked to Tiru Kazhu Kundram (Eagle Hill). Thence, he went to Tiruvanmiyur, Mylapore and Tiruvottriyur where he sang:

> "Let the mind cross the raging Sea of life without hitting against rocks of vital passion. Let my body be Thy temple and the heart's gem be the Lingam. Let Truth be my purity. Let me adore Thee by inner communion."

He was grandly received at Ottriyur. He went to Porur, Aalangadu; then he visited Kalahasti to adore the Lords who blessed Kannappan and kept him by his side. He visited Sri Sailam, crossed the Andhra,

Kannada, Malwa, Lada, Madhyapradesh and reached Benares. He bathed in the Ganges and adored Visvanatha. He ventured to ascend to the Mt. Kailas. He crossed hill, rills and thick forests. He encountered wild animals. He braved dark nights and lonely days. He dared heat and cold, sun and rains. The path was rough and rugged. His legs were worn out, and disabled. He could not walk; he went up rolling with his body. That too was torn and worn. He laid his worn-out body down and closed his eyes murmuring "Siva, Siva, take me to Kailas. Thy abode"... He skipped and hopped along ruts and pits and rough pebbles until movement was no more possible. The whole body was wounded and blood was flowing from wounds. Even the ligaments were torn and bones were crushed in hard pieces of rocks.

"Alas, who are you Sir?" cried a voice and a sage stood before Appar. "Why do you torture your aged body like this?" "Holy Sir" said Appar gently. 'Siva and Sakti reside up the Mt. Kailas. I aspire to see them there with my eyes. This passion has urged my venture."

The sage pitied him and said, "Alas! What an impossible venture! Even celestials cannot approach Kailas. Off with this vain effort of torturing pain! Go back....go back...."

Appar with a resolute will exclaimed, "Unless, I see my Lord, as He is in Kailas, I shall not retrace my steps, carrying this body which must fall dead one day."

The Sage suddenly vanished and a voice was heard in the void! My lover, you have yet to sing and yet to

serve me. Plunge into this spring and rise up at Tiru-Aiyaru. There, behold Kailas and the presence of Siva-Sakti."

Cosmic Vision

Appar obeyed the sage's mandate and plunged into the spring. His wounds were healed-He rose up in a tank at Tiru-Aiyaru. Lo, A blazing splendour! A blissful-sight! The temple of Tiru-Aiyaru became Kailas. Indra and his angels are there warbling Divine glory. Vedas are chanted! Nandi deva is standing there. The hosts of Siva have assembled there; Kailas is visible, Siva sits there like a coral hill upon a silver mountain and Uma by his side shines like an emarald creeper. Appar beholds this splendid revelation with ecstasy. He sees around, the manifestation of Siva and Sakti in the male and female forms. He sings in super-consicious ecstasy his cosmic vision.

This cosmic vision is the highest realisation of Saints who see God in the self and in the cosmos. "As I entered Aiyaru in solemn silence I saw a loving elephant with its beloved and I saw a rare sight unknown before - I saw the world as a manifestation of Siva and Sakti. O, Golden effulgence of Tiru-Aiyaru, Thou art the sound, the word, the light. Thou art the unique Lord of the world. Thou art the fragrant flowers. How sweet it is to speak it Thy glory! O Master, Thou hast placed Thy feet upon my head. Thou art the Light of this land. Hail Siva!"

Appar spent a few days here and then visited some temples until he reached Tiru-Punturuthi near Aiyaru. Here he raised a Mutt. Here he composed varieties

of hymns which are the essence of the Vedas and Agamas.

His Humility

Now the victorious Sambandar returned from Madurai where he planted firmly the bull flag of Saivism. Appar heard of his coming with a number of followers. He merged unknown with the crowd and quietly bore the palanquin of the Boy-Prodigy. Nearing Punturuthi, Sambandar enquired for Appar.

A gentle voice was heard then "Here I am, enjoying the great delight of bearing Thy victory-palanquin." It was the voice of humility which Appar was. Sambandar atonce got down and adored Appar. He stayed for a few days in the monastery of Appar. Appar heard with immense interest the whole history of Saiva victory in Madurai and the plight of the discomfited Jains. All these, we will see in the account of Sambandar. The triumphant Sambandar with his group went forward. Appar too started towards Madurai. He stayed at Madurai under royal patronage and then visited all the temples on his way to Rameswaram. After visiting the temples of the Pandya region, Appar returned to Pugalur and spent his days in singing God's glory in a variety of tunes.

Final Beatitude

He was immersed in Siva-consciousness and had no eyes nor heart for aught else. Maya put before him two temptations. He was cleaning the temple premises and cutting grass with his hoe; gems, gold and pearls came with the grass he cut. Appar threw them away

like rubbish. He was not tempted by gold. Fair sirens tried to allure him by singing, dancing, smiling and guiling with bashful looks. He was not tempted, They went defied. O False appearances, you cannot tempt one who has taken refuge at the feet of Siva. Appar's mission was over. Saivism shall hence thrive from more to more! He attained his final beatitude after breathing his final-song;

"How can I imagine Thee, O Universal Lord! I have no eyes for anything except the feet of God. I am immersed in its glory. O Lord of Pugalur, let me enter beatitude at Thy feet! Sivoham!"

The final beatitude came. The form melted and disappeared. The singer vanished but his songs were immortalised. They were the voice of his soul.

The Purest Apostle of God

The name of Appar has secured universal reverence. His saintly virtues, austere devotion, his celestial charity in alleviating the pain and misery of fellow creatures, the relief he brought to devotees by belief, his patient sacrifices and the dignified roll he played in upholding the Truth of God and His Grace, the treasure of inexhaustible knowledge, he has embalmed in his inspired hymns—all go to declare that he is the purest *Apostle of God* sent by the Divine Grace, to be an eternal Beacon of hope for mankind, a Beacon raised on the rock of ages.

His hymns are spontaneous expressions of his soul steeped in inner communion with the heart's Beloved. They embody his soul's emotions, his life's travails, the

ordeals, he surmounted. They chalk out for mankind a clear-cut path to Godhood. They lead the evolution of the mental man to supramental heights of God-consciousness. His philosophy sums up answers to the eternal queries of what are we, why are we, whence are we and what is our goal. It clearly establishes the Truth of the Upanishad which declares, "Churn within by meditation and discover your Divine essence." His is not a personality cult. The soul is not a slave of any mundane entity. It has its firm centre in God, the highest Truth. "What if you bathe in Ganges or sea waves?" says Appar, "feel God everywhere in every soul. The Divine abodes in the heart of beings. He gave us the mind to think and mouth to praise. Hail Him live in His awareness, serve Him, in the world of beings. Have the faith, feeling, passion and sincerity; pray, love and serve and God's Grace shall be yours." This is the refrain of his 313 decades made available to us. Appar has bequeathed to us an infinite treasure of wisdom with which we can attain the *Light that lights all souls*, the bliss that is the joy of beings and the peace of the immutable transcendence. Appar is not a fatalist, nor a pessimist. He is a bold optimist who can reconcile in his Philosophy of eternal values, the purist and the pragmatist, the psychist and the Scientist. He wants every-one to rediscover the Divine who is the hidden Truth in our heart like fire in the wood and ghee in the milk. His message is: Melt in love like gold in fire and His Grace is sure. He is there waiting for your aspiring call. His Saviour hand is outstretched for the protection of those who take refuge at His feet. Call, He responds; pray, He grants; believe, He relieves you from dangers; meditate, His light is immediate." "O Lord of Virtue, I may be born a humble worm, but let

Thy feet rest in my mind. Name and form do not matter. Let me live in Thy consciousness. That is the Bliss of existence" says Appar. Let humanity walk in the path of God-Love and serve mankind and attain divinity.

22. Kulachirai Nayanar

This Nayanar hailed from Manamelkudi, a village of green luxury in the Pandyanadu. St. Sundarar called him Peru Nambi, a great worthy, fit for honour. Kulachirai was held in esteem by the public for his majesty in service. He was equal-minded to all devotees of God without looking into their birth and pedigree. Whether they belonged to this caste or that caste, this place or that place, whether they are good or bad according to the standard of the world, any devotee of God, Kulachirai evinced his regard and respect.

He stood a host, liberally kind, to God-lovers whether they came singly or collectively. He adored all who wore sacred ashes and uttered Sivanamam. He was so good, so benevolent, so noble, able and so learned, that the Pandyan King, Nedumaran, chose him as his chief minister. The queen had great respect for his pure life and love of God. He vanquished all the political enemies of the state and planned to put down the religious enemies too. But those were days of Jain-domination and the king himself was a Jain-lover.

Kulachirai in collaboration with the queen Pandimadevi, invited to Madurai, Jnanasambandar who challenged the Jain tact, in act and fact and in discussion, he won over all the difficulties by the Divine Grace. Jnanasambandar effected a magic revival and renaissance in the religious field. The Jains were defied by the

divine power in Sambandar and repentence sent them to their self-immolation. Kulachirai Nayanar by dint of his spiritual ardour saved the religion of the soil from the impact of alien faiths.

Tirujnana Sambandar the great Defender-Apostle of Saivism dedicates a powerful hymn to Mangayarkarasi and Kulachirai Nayanar. A few lines are rendered here :

This is the holy Alavoi
Where resides Siva, our Lord,
Where the lovely Pandyan Queen
Upholds the banner of Siva
With the dynamic minister
Kulachirai, the faithful soul,
The sincere patron of Saivism.
One or many, he welcomes all
Saints of Siva and serves their needs.
This austere devotee brings
Laurels to our holy cause
A rare gem to come across...
A brave hero whom Siva chose...

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23. Kurumba Nayanar

Kurumba Nayanar was the chief of the Mizhalainadu. He lived in Perumizhalai. His subjects were pious and virtuous. Kurumban had the intuition to know the heart and mind of devotees. He fulfilled their aspiration and supplied their needs even before they spoke out their wants. He was a fervent devotee of Siva and His lovers. He welcomed real devotees, feasted them, and provided their comforts. He heard the song of the servants of God (Tiru-Thondath thokai) sung by St. Sundarar. He was so much enamoured of Sundarar and his hymns that he held him as his master and took his hymns as his Gospel. By inner communion, he got victory over the mind. He meditated on the five lettered mantra-hymn sung by Sundarar. "O Master of yoga, I have no other occupation except meditating upon Thy Saviour feet in my heart. O, Thou adored by men of spiritual love, even if I forget, my tongue shall be telling thy mantra - Nama Sivaya." The mantra gave him yogic powers.

Once St. Sundarar went to Kodumkolur in the land of Cheraman Perumal. Thence, the Saint was to go to mount Kailas on a white elephant. Kurumba Nayanar loved Sundarar so passionately that life was impossible for him without that Master-Saint. Hence before Sundarar reached Kailas, he was determined to drop down his body and be in advance at Kailas in his astral form. He sat in deep trance; controlled his mind. His breath shot up to the cerebral region and his soul escaped to Mt. Kailas. There, it attained the Divine feet

and also the grace of Sundarar who just reached Kailas on his white elephant.

Yoga is to yoke the mind to the thought of God. Yoga is dynamic service and pure devotion to God.

Kurumba Nayanar was a Panchakshara Yogin who had in his heart and tongue the great mantra Nama-Sivaya. He repeated it with every breath and that set into vibration his psychic planes and opened the petals of his heart releasing the divine perfume therin. He often repeated the inspired lines of St. Sundarar which served as food for his spiritual hunger:

"Woe is day, O Lord, when my mind forgets to remember Thee through the mantra Nama-Sivaya, Thy name is my refuge against fear and sorrow afflicting human life. My sins were absolved by sincere surrender at Thy feet. O Lord of golden hue, whom shall I think and adore as my Saviour except Thee, the Live-Gem shining in my heart...Siva Siva!"

24. Karaikal Ammaiyar

Punitavati

Karaikal is a rich port busy with shipping trade. It is an opulent city of great merchants and industrialists. Their wealth and virtue, honesty in business and their uprightness are proverbial. Danadhatta was the leading trader of Karaikal. His influence and affluence made him a merchant prince. He prayed God for an issue and he was blessed with a charming daughter fair and beautiful like Lakshmi, the Goddess of prosperity. She was named Punitavati and true to her name, she was pure, chaste, devout and dutiful. From the age she was able to walk and talk, she walked on the path of virtue and devotion to Siva and talked about His mercy and glory. She studied holy books and served holy men. Her vernal beauty shone like a poem of floral dawn. The smiling grace on her face had a psychic charm, unfolding the divinity of her soul. Her words and deeds were expressions of divine love swelling in her bosom.

Marriage

Age made her a sage; but the parents fluttered for her marriage. A suitable offer came from Paramadhattan the son of Nitipati a merchant prince of Nagapattinam. Elders of both the ancient families settled the marriage. The day was fixed for the solemn ceremony. The marriage was celebrated with rich feasts and entertainments worthy of the high status of

both families. Money and mansion were endowed upon his daughter by Danadhatta. Nitipati adorned his daughter-in-law with gemmed jewels. Unwilling to send out his only daughter, Danadhatta requested his son-in-law to live with her daughter in the mansion presented to her as a dowry.

Mango—Miracle

The wedded couples lived happily. Peace and plenty crowned their conjugal harmony which flourished in loving and giving. Both were one in their devotion to God and compassion to His creatures. Their hall was open to all saints and seekers. Punitavati took pleasure in feeding and clothing Siva-bhaktas.

The Husband managed his business and the wife managed the home. One day Paramadhatta sent her two sweet mangoes. An aged sage was standing before the mansion. He was hungry. Punitavati received the Siva-bhakta with due decorum. She gave him water to wash himself and seated him highly. Then she served him food with one of the mango fruits sent by her sire. The holy guest appeased his hunger, blessed her hospitability and took leave of her.

The husband returned at noon from his shop and the wife received him lovingly and served him with her delicious preparations. He asked for the mango and she served him with the one mango she had. The husband found it so sweet that he demanded the other too. How to find it again?

Perplexed, she went in and sent a fervent prayer to Siva and the Lord in His mercy placed into her

chaste hands, a 'Sweet golden mango.' The fond husband found it extremely sweet.

He: I think this mango is sweeter than what I sent you. Where did you get it?

She: I cannot hide the truth, Sir. A hungry sage ate here. I served him with one of your two mangoes. One I reserved and served you. You asked for the other. I prayed God and He placed into my hands this nectar fruit.

He: Is it so? Then let me have another fruit like this by your God's grace.

She: If it is His Will—

Punitavati went into her Puja-room and fervently prayed God to grant her another fruit and save her honour. God heard her sincere prayer and placed into her hands a more delicious fruit. She thanked His Grace and gave it to her husband. He received it eagerly and was eager to relish it, when it disappeared as if by magic.

The husband was possessed by awe and reverence for his divine wife. With tremulous mind he thought: "You are too divine for the touch of my mortal hands."

The Husband Marries Again

He left home, sailed abroad loading all his goods in a ship. He returned with fabulous wealth but settled at a Pandyan port. He married there, a girl of his heart and got a luminous daughter whom he named after his divine wife as Punitavatiar. He cherished

always a divine reverence for his first wife and that enhanced his wealth and well-being.

Days rolled on behind the curtain of mystery. Punitavati was engrossed in her psychic devotion to Siva whose grace descended into her and made her life a stream of pious peace. She prayed for her husband's happiness too.

But her parents and relatives wanted her to live with her husband. They found out his whereabouts and took her there in a palanquin. They stayed in another house and sent word to Paramadhattan. He was puzzled, but his conscience urged him on. He went to see the Divine lady with his second wife and child.

Wife—Worship

He saw that chaste angel, fair like a fawn and a peacock, with the fire of scintilating fervour in her eyes. He trembled with fear and reverence and fell at her feet. The new wife and child too fell at her feet. The relatives stood stupified.

They: Ah Paramadhatta, how can you worship like this, your Wife?

He: Dear Sirs, She is not my wife: She is my Goddess. She is a light of purity and divinity transcending humanity. I do not see her with the carnal eyes. I see her with my heart's eyes, as a lady of God.

Here, my daughter bears her sacred name. I will always adore her in my heart's core....Karaikal Ammaiyar, the Mother of Karaikal is a super-human reality. I salute her again.

Becomes A Spirit

The relatives stood stunned and nonplussed. Punitavati the Mother of Karaikal, quailed a bit when her husband prostrated before her. But suddenly, she was reborn in a new plane of supramental-consciousness and declared:

"O Lord, I can no more endure this flesh; this fair body I kept for him. He regards me as an angel. So let it be. Om Sivam! Let my flesh drop down and the human form disappear. Let not the mortal coil recoil me again. O God, Make me a spirit. So she became a mere skeleton, a vital entity. Heaven showered flowers of blessings; the celestials hailed her glory. Sages praised her. Parents and relatives fell at her feet and ejaculated "Hail Mother of Karaikal!"

Spirit-Form

The Mother, now a God-possessed skeleton, light like air, went from temple to temple singing her wonderful songs. She flew towards Mt. Kailas and when she reached the foot of the Himalayas, she went up with her head on the ground, afraid to defile the holy height with her feet. Uma saw her and looked at Her consort Siva. Siva told her "She is a Mother devoted to me."

She got this form by my Grace, for my sake. As she approached Him, He called her "Come Mother" and she cried in delight "Father, Thou art my sole refuge" She adored Siva and spoke out:

"O Lord, I pray for a deathless love towards Thee which is my only bliss. I want no more birth. If birth comes by Thy Will, let it be a stream of deathless

rememberance of Thy Grace. I want to live at Thy feet singing Thy glory and delighting in Thy cosmic dance, O Siva!"

God granted her aspirations and said, "Mother, go to Tiru Alankadu! (37 miles from Madras in the Chengleput Dist.) There, witness my Cosmic dance and sing, in ecstasy." "Father, let Thy will be done" said Karaikal Ammaiyar as she flew to Tiru Alankadu. She walked upon her head into the temple and there witnessed Siva's dance and sang her thrilling *Arpuda Tiru Anthathi*. Here is the substance of her inspired lines:

Her Prayer

"Since I began to speak, I spoke of Him; and my love for Him is limitless. Hail Nilakanta! Though He pities not my plight, though he frees me not from pain, my heart shall never cease from loving Him! I am His slave even unto seven births. He creates all, sustains all and destroys all. His mercy is for those who cry for His Grace. Some say He abides in heaven; some say He pervades the universe. I say He resides in my heart and pervades my being! His Grace it is which rules the universe. His Grace annuls rebirth. His Grace is perfect Truth and I merge into it! He is my lovely father, and my Master. I treasure Him in my heart! Nothing is now rare to me! We have crossed the ocean of birth, O heart, for we have found out a raft at His feet which is our sole refuge! Behold Him with love; there he is seen! He caused this world to be! He knows all; He is the

knower, and the known. He is the Truth of Things. He is the five elements, the sun, moon and the witnessing Soul. He responds in the same measure, form and attribute with which true lovers adore and approach Him. Where is He? He is in my thinking mind: He is the Thinker in the mind and Feeler in my heart.

"We have conquered Death! We have spurned hell. We have rooted out the twin Karmas. For, we have taken refuge in Him who destroyed the triple forts with his dart of fire. Adorations to Siva, the God of Gods!"

25. Appudi Adigal

Adigal means a humble servitor of God and His saints. Appu means father. Appudi Adigal of Tingalur is a humble servant of God who is the father of all beings and who serves His devotees. He was a staunch devotee of Nataraja, the God of Cosmic dance. He was austere, flawless, a sage in family life. He was a pure Brahmin who observed all Vedic traditions. He was equal-minded. He passionately loved Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar. He consecrated everything to his name. Sekkizhar calls him Arasu, for the sake of brevity. Let us follow him. Even without seeing Arasu, he adored his name, and adapted it to all his charitable establishments. He was an ideal house-holder free from lust, greed, envy, anger, falsehood and caste pride. His simplicity shunned publicity. Once Appar himself visited Tingalur and was surprised to see tanks, mutts, gardens, water pandals etc. in his name. He made enquiries. People directed him to Appudi Adigal. Appar stood before his portals. Appudi came running to receive a Saint. He exclaimed "Salutations, O Saint, You are welcome to my humble home!"

Appar: Nama Sivaya! Holy Sir, you have established so many charities. They must bear your name. But I see the name of some one else in them. Why so?

Appudi: Holy Sir, I feel sorry for this curt remark. Is my name worth more than that of the great soul, Tirunavukkarasu? It was a title given by Siva

Himself. His hymns have worked miracles. His divine power has defied the cruel designs of the enemies of Saivism. Fire, poison and elephant could not kill him. The stone tied to his neck served a boat in the ocean.—He crossed the waves tied to a heavy stone—His power converted the King into a Saiva. St. Sambandar himself called him Appar—That divine Apostle of Saivism-Him I adore as my Master and by His name I call all that the Divine has given me. Who are you Sir, to question my love for my Arasu? You look a sage. How is it that you are ignorant of my Saviour-Master?

Appar: Good Sir, I am that humble soul whom God reclaimed to His faith by curing the colic pain. I am that servant of devotees who was saved by the Divine Grace, during trials.

Appudi: O, my Lord! my Master! How fortunate I am to see the Great-soul whose deeds have inspired me impersonally. O Elder-Tirunavukkarasu! Younger Tirunavukkarasu, O, my wife, friends, come all—Salute the Saint of Saints! I feel as if a delightful treasure has sought me.

Appudi sang and danced in ecstasy. The whole family, friends and relatives showered flowers and worshipped Appar with extreme love and joy. Appar gave them holy ashes and said, "Let Siva bless you all." He made all sing the "Nama Sivaya mantra."

Appudi's wife prepared a rich feast for Appar. Appar entered silent meditation in a private room while savoury preparations went on for the feast. The elder-

Arasu was sent to bring plantain leaves from the garden. He ran with enthusiasm. But alas, a cobra twined around his hand and bit him as he was cutting the leaf. The boy ran fast with the leaf, laid it at the feet of the mother and fell dead overpowered by the poison. The parents concealed their grievance and hid the dead body folding it in a couch so that the holy guest may not know what happened.

All adored Appar again, took him for the lunch and received holy ashes from him. The Saint noted the absence of the elder Arasu and asked Appudi to call him. "Holy Master" murmured Appudi, "My eldest son will not be available now."

Appar felt the grievance wrenching the devotee's heart. When the incident came to light, Appar saw the body, had it brought to the temple and sang ten verses. "His thought is one. The high Mt. Kailas where He resides is one blissful abode for all souls. He is the unique power that can remove the poison injected by the teeth of the snake—" The boy rose to life again , saluted him and Appar gave him holy ashes and blessed him. This miracle raised high the name and fame of Appar. Then Appar took food with Appudi and his family and friends. The Saint sanctified the mansion of Appudi for a few days and went to Tiru Pazhanam where he sang the greatness of Appudi who meditated upon Appar unto the last and reached the feet of God.

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26. Tiru Nila Nakka Nayanar

Sattamangai is a fair and fertile town in the land cherished by the Cauveri. Green fields and lotus tanks and groves enhance its beauty. The women of the place are chaste and graceful. They look like the Goddess of red lotus. As they bathe in tanks, swans too play and bathe around them. Its atmosphere vibrates with Vedic hymns chanted by pious Brahmins in holy mutts. They tend the triple fire and the fourth is woman's purity-fire.

Nila Nakkar was a prominent Vedic scholar and lover of Siva and the whole town held him in high regard. He was well-versed in Agamas and followed its rules and rituals strictly in his worship of Siva. His chaste wife closely helped him. He took delight in adoring the feet of Saints.

Once on the Tiruvadirai day sacred to Nataraja, he finished worship at home and began worship in the temple called *Ayavanti.* His wife assisted him. The flower-ceremony was over. He uttered Siva mantra, revelling at the beauty of Sivalingam. Just then a spider alighted on the Lingam and the wife of the Nayanar blew it off with her mouth. "Ah, what have you done, lady—alas, your spittle must have sprayed on the Lingam!" cried the alarmed Nayanar. "Excuse me Sir, I just blew off in haste, the spider" said the humble lady. "No excuse for this sacrilege! Keep away from me! Off!" cried the husband. Even the sun sank in the west-hill, ashamed of this act. The

impatient Nayanar hurried to his house and the repenting wife stayed the night praying to God, in the temple. The Nayanar had a dream that night. Siva with matted hair appeared and said "Behold my body affected by sores except the place where your wife has blown." The Nayanar now knew the innocence of his wife. He hurried to the temple early morning, worshipped God, spoke to his wife with gentle courtesy and brought her home. His daily worship went on with usual solemnity.

The Nayanar was a sincere devotee of St. Jnana-Sambandar who visited Sattamangai one fair day. The Nayanar decorated the town with flags, festoons, buttings, and pandals and gave the great boy Saint a holy welcome singing his hymns. He treated him and his followers to a delicious dinner. He lodged them conveniently in his house. To the pannar Tirunilakanta who played the harp when Sambandar sang, he boldly gave a cosy bed just near the Vedic fire, the most holy spot in the house. Saint Sambandar appreciated his equal-minded hospitality to the devotees of God and praised him in a stirring hymn. He often saw Jnanasambandar and witnessed his marriage at Nallur. A splendid light burst out there, into which he too disappeared along with Jnanasambandar and many other devotees of God.

God-love transcends all differences of caste and ceremonial rules. Purity of heart promotes divinity of men and women.

27. Naminandi Adigal

Emapperur near Tiru-Arur is a famous place nourished by Cauveri river. Beauty and harmony played in its streets; bees played in flowers; clouds played on house tops. Vedas played in the gentle morning breeze; angels played in its pools and God's grace played in its serene majesty.

Naminandi Adigal was an ideal Brahmin of the place. He chanted Vedas and tended holy fires. His front shone with holy ashes. He took pleasure in walking to Arur to worship there, Thyagaraja Swami.

On the way there was the Araneri temple. Naminandi renewed it and carried on with his ritual worship there. One evening he wanted to light lamps in the temple. He requested the neighbouring people to give him some ghee or oil for illumination. They were Jains and they chuckled at him saying "O Brahmin, Your God has fire in His hand! Light lamps with that or with water"

Pricked by these sarcasms, Naminandi prayed to God and heard His voice saying "He needs no light. We have no oil. Light lamps with water"

The Nayanar trimmed the wicks, poured water and lit the lamps uttering Siva mantram and they shed flaming lights brighter than oil lamps. The Jains were discomfited. This miracle added fame and name to the Nayanar. The King of Arur appointed him as the executive manager of the grand Arur temple. The

Nayanar did his duty as a tapasya and conducted grand festivals to the joy and appreciation of the public. But he could not stand the crowd atmosphere.

He once mixed with the masses, as the God was taken in a festive procession to Manali. He felt himself polluted and slept outside on the pial. His wife asked him why he did not come in. He politely replied "I mixed with all sorts of people to night; I must take my bath in the morning and then enter my room in the home". The wife knew his qualms; but God came in his dream and said "All born at Arur are My own, My followers; there is no pollution in mixing with them". The Nayanar now understood the truth. He entered into the house as usual and told his wife about his dream-vision.

After ablutions, he went early morning to the temple and Lo, he saw Siva in all devotees who worshipped there. A spiritual thrill animated his being. He sent his heart's fervent prayer to God. St. Appar appreciated his psychic devotion and hailed him as a sacred devotee in one of his hymns. Love is the heart of devotion and service its dynamic expression.

28. St. Tirujnana Sambandar

His Advent

The advent of Tirujnana Sambandar brought a flourishing impetus to the Vedic way of life. It gave a new momentum to the superior creed of Saivism. He sobbed as a child for the auspicious wellbeing of all lives. Let us adore his lotus feet and carry on our great mission!

He was the gem of Pugali, otherwise called Sirkazhi, Brahmapuram or Kazhumalam, the holy place which washes of all impurities. It is a city of flourishing fields, near Chidambaram. Its green beauty is cradled in the music of flowing hymns, cooing birds, blowing winds and glowing hearts, hailing the glory of God. Fields, groves, orchards and lotus tanks adorn the majesty of its Nature's grandeur. Ghee-fed altars send up circling fumes like song-fed emotion of God-lovers. It is a city of aeons that stands the flood of times. Spiritual dynamism is generated from the Sanctum of its temples.

Such a sacred place saw the advent of Jnana Sambandar whose history is a play of divine mystery. What Sankara did in thirty two years of his existence, Jnana Sambandar did within a span of sixteen years. Sekkizhar has sung his glory in 1,256 quatrains, 5,024 lines. Sambandar sang in thousands; but only 384 Thevarams are left to us by the intrusion of the Time-Spirit. Each Thevaram contains eleven quatrains, the last containing the name of the poet-prophet. He lived

in the ninth century but the spiritual force generated by his evangel, shall flow for ages purifying and divinising humanity.

His father was Siva-pada-irudayar (one who has Siva's feet in his heart). He was a Vedic-Brahmin devoted to Siva. His mother was the chaste Bhagavatiyar. The child was born on the earth with the nostalgia of Heaven. He was conscious of the Divine Presence which sent him here to accelerate the wheel of human evolution, to quicken the God-ward elan of mankind.

The day which gave him birth was a golden day for God-lovers. They felt a new delight; they saw a new light chasing the night of dark despair. The air breathed a new perfume. The gentle breeze was laden with the harmony of hope. An auspicious song-thrill filled the air. Even the fauna and flora felt with mankind, the presence of a Saviour.

The home where he was born was jubilant with unknown joy. People felt as if a charming child was born in their home. The fortunate parents fondled and handled the child like a treasure of God, granted to them. The tender child was delighted in hearing the Vedas and in babbling "Siva, Siva!". It sat beautifully, smiled charmingly, tottered with jingling trinkets, walked fascinatingly, spoke inspiringly and grew rapidly into a precocious urchin of three years. Divinity radiated from his tender beauty and the word of God sparked out of his heart. Wisdom played in his childish pranks. Sweetness emitted by his movements. The coming Saviour characterised his winning manners. The child manifested the prophet, every day.

The Milk of Grace

One day, the child of three summers followed the father to the temple tank-*Brahmathirtham*. The father seated it on the steps and went for a dip. He was engaged in his ceremonial routines. The child turned its sparkling eyes towards the temple tower; it was the tower of the Sanctum of Toniappar (The Divine Father whose Grace is a Saviour boat for the human soul struggling in the sea of Samsara). The child stretched its tender hands towards the gracious Divine and sobbed and wept crying, "Ammaye! Appa—Mother, father"—with flowing tears and throbbing lips, the child called for the Grace of the Father and Mother of all beings.

The cry went to the heart of Siva who turned to Uma, His Sakti, and said "Feed that luminous child with thy gracious milk of wisdom in a golden cup". Sakti filled the golden cup with the milk of grace from her bosom of mercy. She fondled the child. Siva wiped out the tears trickling from its eyes. Sakti embraced the child, and fed it with the cup of milk. The child possessed by the Divine Grace (Aludai Pillai) became Jnana sambandan due to the knowledge of Siva that sweetened the milk given by Sakti in the golden cup of psychic love. The child was reborn in the Divine Grace. It was transformed into the light of Siva-consciousness which removes all bondages, all mundane thoughts, and steeps the soul in Bliss Divine. The child was charged with the Divine power needed to fulfil the great mission of its advent. A new voice was opened in its soul and new rhythms burst out of its inner fire. The precocious child was muttering new words surging from the fountain of the awakened spirit.

He Stole My Heart

The anxious father hurried to the child with a golden cup and saw the milk trickling from its lips. "Ah, who fed you with this milk? It may be a polluted food—tell me—Ah!" ranted the orthodox father. The radiant child raised its tender hands to heavens, then looked at the temple tower. His eyes were afire with scintillating wisdom. A wonderful song burst out of his emotion:

That God of grand Brahmapuram
With jewelled ears and mooned crest
Smearing ashes, riding a bull-
One with Uma—behold, that Thief
Has stolen away my loving heart!

Ganga flows on his crescent-tuft;
Adoring Brahma had his Grace.
He crushed the pride of Ravana
The learned wise worship His feet.
In loving hearts he has his seat.
He is the Thief that stole my heart!

God's Messenger!

The father wondered! Savants gathered around him in surprise. Siva's hosts cheered around him. Priests led him with temple honours into the Presence of Sattanathar, the God of Sirkazhi. Bards sang his glory; instruments played in loud eclat: Sambandar sang, "My Lord is there with Uma to save devotees wherever they are." Lights waved and incense fumed as hearts hailed the high emotion of the gifted child. "O Sea of wisdom! Our treasure, the fortune of Sirkazhi, gem of our Cauveri-land. Light of knowledge, Splendour of divinity. Hail gifted messenger of God, poet of Grace

Divine. Such were the outbursts of ovations which rent the air. His fame reached far and wide and multitudes eagerly waited to see and hear and adore him. The first round of his spiritual ministrations was confined to neighbouring temples. Let us follow the illumined child to some important temples where his hymns worked miracles creating in all, deeper faith in God.

Golden Cymbals

The father now carried Sambandar to Tiru-kolakka quite near Sirkazhi. The child of three years sang a thrilling Thevaram beating time with his hands. A pair of gold cymbals with the mantra Namasivaya inscribed on them, came into his hands by the Divine Grace and he was happy to keep time with them. Tiru-Nila Kanta-Yal-pannar with his wife, offered instrumental accompaniment to the melodious voice of Sambandar. Pannar was a master in playing the lute (yal) and his wife had a melodious voice. Sambandar treated them very kindly and they enhanced the effect of his inspired songs. The chorus thrilled into the heart of devotees. He crossed the Kolladam and entered Chidambaram. At Chidambaram, Sambandar was given a splendid reception and he saw the 3000 priests of the temple as Sivaganas, the hosts of Lord Siva. He sang, "The learned priests of Tillai foster the spiritual flames which destroy the evil Kali. Lord Nataraja shines there with a crescent on his crest. Those who take refuge at His feet, are saved from sins!" This Thevaram with the lute-accompaniments impressed the people of Chidambaram. He sang at Tiruvetkalam nearby and stayed there a few days. Sambandar made fervent song-offering to Nataraja, overwhelmed by spiritual emotions. He saw

again the priests as hosts of Siva and adored them as they adored him. He praised the priests and hailed the Divine Grace in a melodious song and went to Puliyur where Pannanar was born. "This place is blessed by your birth" told he to Yalpannar.

Royal Paraphernalia

He sang at Pennadakam and thence he walked on foot to Tiru-Aratturai. God appeared in the dream of devotees and said, "The gem of Kazhi walks to me in the hot sun. Take from my temple, the litter inlaid with pearls, with the royal paraphernalia of the ornamental canopy, blow conch-shells declaring his glory and bring him here with princely honours." God appeared in the dream of Sambandar and said "Use the litter and all paraphernalia which I am sending you."

Thus Sambandar (a boy of eight years now) was borne in a palanquin to Tiru-Aratturai. It was a blessed dawn when the Divine messenger came in a pearled palanquin hailed by devotees aloud exclaiming, "Here comes our Saviour, and Siva's Grace radiates around him. Here comes the inspired poet who conquers our hearts with his divine Tamil hymns. Saivam flourishes by his wonderful songs." Thus Sambandar travelled from temple to temple in State regalia. People proclaimed his glory and he proclaimed God's glory. For he consecrated all his gifts to His Grace.

At Cheignalur, Sambandar got down from his pearl palanquin and walked humbly, for it was the birth place of the great devotee Chandesa Nayanar. Sambandar sang the devotional fervour of this Nayanar. After

visiting Tiruppanandal and other places, Sambandar returned with his father to Sirkazhi and the whole town thronged to receive this spiritual gem with royal honours. His Mother Bhagavati, adorned the house grandly to receive his divine son. He distributed holy ashes to all, singing his Thevarams in an impressive chorus.

Chants Vedas

Now, Sambandar was invested with the sacred thread and taught Gayatri. The Brahmins desired that he studied the Vedas. But to their surprise the intutive genius of eight years, chanted the four Vedas with proper intonation and explained their intrinsic meaning. His hymns in Tamil were really the essence of the Vedas and Agamas. The orthodox Brahmins bowed before his genius and learnt from him the inner meaning of the ancient scriptures. He explained to them the significance of Panchakshara, the five lettered Siva mantra.

Meets Appar

The next great event of the Saivite world was the meeting of Sambandar and Tirunavukkarasar. Sambandar called him *Appar* and Arasu said *Adiyen* (I am a servitor) while exchanging courtesies. They liked each other and became one in popularising Saivism by songs and service. We have already seen this in Chapter 21.

The second round of evangelist tour began in full deployment of his regal paraphernalia as usual. The father too, went with his son. He wanted funds to perform a grand Sacrifice, Yagam. The party visited all

shrines North of the Cauveri—Velur, Pungur, Vanniyur, Pandanai Nallur, Velvikkudi, Tirupazhanam and came to Tiruvaiyaru where a grand reception was accorded to him. He sang many emotional hymns in the temple hailing the Divine Grace that comes to protect real devotees from fear and grief. "There is nothing impossible to the God of Iyaru. He is with us always" This was the burden of his hymns.

Cures Epilepsy

Continuing the tour Sambandar visited many temples on the way and reached Tirupachil Achiramam. The chief of the place was Kollimazhavan. His daughter suffered from a chronic fit of epilepsy. Medicines and mantras, had no effect on her. Kollimazhavan received Sambandar with fervent devotion and brought his daughter to the temple, Sambandar saw her and prayed God for her. "O Lord, Thy power is limitless. Have you no power over this disease afflicting this lady. Would you see her suffer still"? sang he and Lo! the lady was made whole. She stood up and worshipped her Saviour. Her father was delighted. Both adored the Saint. They came round the temple with him and lived a new life.

Ague Fever Subsides

The saint continued his tour in regions South of the Cauveri (Kongunadu). It was a cold season. Heavy dews were falling and Chenkundrur people suffered from ague fever (like malaria). "Seek the feet of Siva who shall ward us from all ills and evils", sang Sambandar. Fever subsided and people expressed their gratitude to the Saint.

Pearl-Canopy

Hot summer again afflicted the devotees. A canopy of pearls descended miraculously by Siva's grace. It afforded a refreshing shade to Sambandar and his party. The young Saint took pleasure in walking under it thanking God for His mercy. The pilgrimage went through many holy places on the way with songs and humanitarian services. After visiting many places Navalur, Naraiyur, Sivapuram, Kudamookku (Kumbakonam), Nagesvaram, Tiru Idaimarudur, the party reached Tiru-Avadu Turai.

1000 Gold Pieces

There, father Sivapada Irudaya requested his son to send him back to Sirkazhi with sufficient gold to continue his great yagam (Sacrifice). Sambandar sang :

"I seek Thy feet and adore Thee
In woe and pain, in life and death.
Awake asleep, I think of Thee,
While strong and weak I worship Thee ;
Feasting or fasting, I think of Thee
At Thy feet I am a refugee.
Wouldst Thou not hear my plea ?"

A Divine Spirit appeared and placed on the altar there, a packet of thousand gold pieces and the son gave it to the father saying; "This is enough for your Sacrifice and for the sacrifice of many more Vedic Brahmins." Ah, the miracle of Tamil hymns !

Lute Defied

The father went home and the son went onward to many other places and came to Dharmapuram. This was

the place where Pannar's mother was born. His relatives came and worshipped Sambandar. Pannar played on his lute, while his wife sang all the Thevarams of Sambandar. His relatives thought that the hymns of Sambandar got wide publicity due to Pannar's lute. But "the credit goes to my Master" said Pannar adoring his feet. He prayed his Master to sing a complicated tune which the lute cannot follow. This was to prove that Thevaram tunes were far beyond imitation in the lute." Sambandar sang and sang in complex tunes which the Pannar struggled hard to play on the lute. He got confused and humiliated and tried to break his lute. Sambandar prevented him saying, "Strings cannot follow the songs, for they cannot measure the greatness of God's Glory. Have the lute and play what is possible to the best of your ability. God will lead you."

Nila's Reception

They continued their pilgrimage as usual and reached Tiru-chatta Mangai where Tiru-Nila-Nakka Nayanar gave a grand reception, in the famous Ayavandi temple. After song-offering, "Sambandar with his followers stayed the night in the house of Nila-Nakka Nayanar.

Chiru Thondar's Hospitality

Chiru Thondar welcomed Sambandar at Tiru-Chengattangudi. A song offering was made in the temple Ganapatisvaram. The Saint stayed under the hospitability of Chiru Thondar for a few days and then left for Tirumarukal.

Cures Snake Bite

A merchant accompanied by a virgin, stayed there in a temple mutt. A snake bit him that night and he was dying. The virgin who was to marry him was in agony. She cried bitterly, broken-hearted. Sambandar came there and enquired about the incident. She fell at his feet and related sobbing, "We are seven daughters to Daman a merchant of Vaippur. I loved this man and fled with him resolved to marry him. O Saint Master, restore him to life." Sambandar sang a song and the poison left him and he rose up and worshipped the Saint. The Saint thus enabled their wedding and blessed them.

Tours With Appar

Sambandar with his party went to Tiru-Pugalur and stayed in the Mutt of Muruganar. St. Appar came there after visiting Tiru-Arur and Sambandar gave him an impressive welcome. Appar stayed in the Mutt of Muruganar while Sambandar visited Arur. He was accorded a very grand welcome there and Sambandar melted with love divine and made a fervant song offering. After visiting the temples around, Sambandar returned to Tirupugalur. Chiru Thondar and Nila-Nakkar joined them, All of them started on a pilgrimage and came to Tiru-Kadavur where Kungiliakalaya Nayanar gave them a hearty welcome. They stayed with him for a few days, resumed their pilgrimage and reached Tiru-vizhi Mizhalai.

Famine Relief

We have already read about the famine and pestilence that affected the land. Rains failed, rivers dried

up; even the grass withered. Both the Saints prayed God and God placed for them a gold coin on the Eastern and Western Altars with which they fed their devotees. Their prayers brought better days. After the famine relief they proceeded further and reached Vedaranyam (Maraikadu).

Vedic Doors Open

We have already seen how the song of Appar opened the Vedic door closed centuries ago and how Sambandar sang to close it.

Messengers from the Queen of Madurai invited Jnana Sambandar to put down the heretics there.

Bold Venture

We have seen how Sambandar ventured boldly to undertake the hard mission at Madurai after singing thus: "The blue throated Lord has entered my heart with his consort. The planets shall hence be auspicious to His ardent lover Now let us go there." For, The brightest chapter in Sambandar's life is his expedition to Madurai and his re-establishment of Saivism in the Pandya capital and the re-conversion of Kunpandyan.

Madurai was dominated by Jains and the Pandyan king was converted. Many followed his example. Saivism was struggling and flickering for existence. Even the temple light was not bright. The queen was the daughter of a Chola King. She was a staunch Saivite and so was Premier Kula-Chirai (the bond of the community) a strong Saivite. Both of them sent secret messengers to Sambandar who accompanied them at

once dedicating a song for the Divine Guidance and protection.

Hail Alavoyilan

Sambandar stepped into the Pandyan Kingdom with his princely paraphernalia: "Hail Madurai where Mangayarkarasi carries on her service to Siva" sang he. The prime minister Kula-chirai met him and took him to the temple. The queen met him there. He entered the Sanctum with the temple honours. He sang a moving song. "Those who take refuge in Him the-blue-throated Siva of Madurai, shall live long and rule over the world victoriously. Hail Siva who has kicked Death and who sits in contemplation under the banian tree. Think of the limitless glory of my father, in Alavoy. Adore His feet and all evils shall cease and happiness shall prolong in life."

Tamil Savants saluted the inspired Saint. Kula-chirai was all enthusiasm. Mangayarkarasi the queen joined her palms up and adored Jnanasambandar saying "I and my husband are very fortunate to see thee here and perhaps it is the fruit of our Tapasya." "I have simply come to admire your services to Saivism amidst such hostile surroundings" said the Saint. All the protogonists of Saivism saluted Sambandar and he lodged in a convenient Mutt near the temple. The Saint was steeped in prayer to God for the success of his divine mission. He developed inner strength to face the situation.

Hostile Fire

The presence of Sambandar created a stir; Jains were perturbed. Their leaders made loud complaints

to the king, KunPandyan - "O king, the untoward has happened."

King: What is that?

Jains: A young Saiva Brahmin, a mere boy, has entered your capital with his entourage, to defeat us in discussions. To see him is sight-pollution and to hear his name is ear-pollution.

King: Is it so? What is his purpose? Who is he?

Jains: A little boy! They say he got knowledge from Siva. He challenges us in debate.

King: Hum! Is it so? What shall we do now?

Jains: We must face him in discussion. And before that, we will set fire, by our magic, to his residence-a mutt near the temple.

King: Go and do what ought to be done?

The opposing forces played with fire. Their incantation did not set fire. They set fire cunningly to the residence of the Saint of God. But it was quickly put out by the devotees. The Saint sang a pathetic hymn. He was angry with the miscreants encouraged by the king and hence he said "Let this fire which came to burn me slowly take hold of the King."

Have Courage!

Even before this, the queen saw the king morose and melancholy.

Queen: My lord, what troubles your mind?

King: A boy has come from the Cauveri-land to challenge our savants in discussion. He ashes all faces—How to put him down?

Queen: Why pine over this, my lord? Let us hear both and support him who manifest higher divinity and spiritual power.

Burning Plague

The news came that the king's body was consumed by a burning plague. His frame suffered extreme pain. His mind reeled and his heart failed; the soul was fluttering for escape. Doctors tried their pills and potions. The Jains applied their arts. They sprinkled mantra-water and stroked the body with peacock feathers. There was no abatement in the burning agony. The queen and the premier spoke to the king about Saint Sambandar "I shall be his who heals me—Bring Sambandar said the King sending off the Jains.

Fear Not

The Queen and the Premier quickly saw Sambandar in his Mutt. They saw the embodiment of knowledge, cool moon on the earth, the protector of the Vedas, the singer of God—They got a new confidence.

Sambandar: Anything wrong?

Premier: The King's body burns with the fire which enemies set here! Please cure the king by God's Grace and victory is ours!

Sambandar: It is God's Grace that makes and unmakes. Fear not. Our victory is assured.

Sambandar went to the temple and invoked the Divine Grace to grant victory to His faith.

"O God who swallowed poison to save the Devas, Give me victory which is the victory of Saivism" After this prayer Sambandar went with his entourage to the palace. People cheered him; Jains feared but they too came and threw their challenge.

Sambandar Cures the King

Sambandar saw the king and the king saw Sambandar and felt some relief in his presence. The king saluted the Saint unawares. He seated him highly. The Jains challenged for discussion. The night passed in deep agony. The queen saw Sambandar and was afraid of the hostile forces. Sambandar smiled and sang a quatrain of courage: "Think not, O Pandyan queen, what this boy can do against the hosts of hostile forces that have influenced the king. I have the strength and power of the king of Kings—Hara of Alavoi—have courage, O, Queen". "First cure; then talk. Let Jains take my left side and the Saint the right side. Try your arts now", said the king.

The king again saluted the Saint saying "you are my mantra and my medicine". Jains tried their art on the left; the burning fever raged wilder. Sambandar applied holy ashes on the right side singing his famous song, "Mandiram Avatu Niru", a lyric on the glorious power of the holy ashes :

"Holy Ashes of the Siva of Alavoi, It is the powerful mantra. It shines on the face of celestials. It adds beauty and is extolled by every devotee. It is the symbol of our religion. It is the cure-all. Vedas

praise Vibhuti which relieves severe pain and misery. It accords wisdom, It is the truth; It accords strength and stamina and success in spiritual endeavours. It is delightful to smear it; It enhances virtues".

This hymn and the application of the holy ashes healed the right side, while the left was still burning despite fond incantations of the Jains. The king requested Sambandar to cure the left side too. The Saint smeared the holy ashes on the left side and sang:

Lo; the cure was complete. The king stood up fully healed and strong and spoke out "Victory goes to Sambandar and Saivism." The king bowed at the feet of Sambandar with the queen.

Fire and Flood Test

But the relentless opponents still persisted on discussion. "Alright" said the Saint. "No talk—let us test our scriptures on fire—" said the Jains. The flames were lit. The Jains threw into the flames a plamleaf containing their doctrines. It was burnt to ashes. Sambandar wrote a chosen hymn (Bhogamarta) and offered the palmleaf to the flames. It was not burnt. It came out brighter. "Saivism has won" said the king. "Let us have a water-test" said the Jains. All followed the king and the Saint to the Vaigai river which was rapid and brimful. The Jaina scroll (containing the words Asti-Nasti) was thrown into the rapid stream; it was swept away and was not found again.

Sambandar wrote his famous song of benediction (Vazhga Andanar) on the palm leaf and left it to the rapid stream. This is the substance of the verse:

"Vive Sages, celestials, cows. Pour rains! Prosper king! Perish evils! Let Haranam fill the world to ward off evils! O people, take refuge at the feet of my Father and listen. Come and adore the Almighty God; have relief from pain and misery. Be one in mind; have a single-hearted love for God. Extol ye all—the Supreme Sivam!"

The leaf went up the stream and was recovered at Tiru Edakam. Another miracle happened when Sambandar sang "Let the king prosper on (Vendanum Onguka); the hump disappeared from the back of the king and he stood straight and saluted the Saint.

Victory To Saivism

"The king stands straight, Truth is straight and Saivism stands straight" ejaculated the people. "Victory to Saivism! Victory to Sambandar", declared the king amidst cheers of friends and tears of foes! The king received the holy ashes from the Saint and all devotees did so. Trumpets proclaimed the triumph of Truth and God. Saivism spread rapidly under royal patronage. Conscience wreaked vengeance upon the miscreants. Treachery met with a tragic end. Sambandar was given a grand state-reception in the palace, The queen and the premier who were the faithful instruments, adored Sambandar whose divinity vouchsafed victory, and the whole country felt happy.

Father, Sivapadar, heard this victory and hurried to see his divine boy. They met and people hailed "Glory to Sambandar." Sambandar sang his Hallelujah (Manil nallavannam) which is oft quoted by Saivites:

"We can live in good peace and prosperity on this earth. We can attain our aspirations and reach our goal. Let us adore Him who lives with his consort at Kazhumalam. Let us adore Siva with His Shakti. There is no other refuge, O My heart! Take refuge at the feet of Him whose Grace possessed me by feeding me with the Milk of Wisdom."

Victory Song

Jnanasambandar desired to visit all the holy centres of the Pandyan Kingdom. A grand send off was accorded to him. The king, queen and the premier accompanied him. They visited Tirupparan Kundram, Tirupputhur, Kanapper, Kuttralam, Tirunelveli, Rameswaram and then all went in a boat to Ceylon. There, they visited Tirukedeswaram and Tiruk-Konamalai. After their itenary in Ceylon, they visited Tiruvadanai, Tiruppunalvasal and Manamerkudi, and stayed there a few days and then set out to the land of the Cauveri. The king and the queen adored Sambandar always.

Earth and heaven echoed with his victory song: "Victorious Siva residing in Alavoi, Sages sing thy glorious feet! Thou art everything to us! Joy and sorrow, good and bad come by Thy Will. Thou art the origin and the end. Thou art the Light of Lights. Vedas hail Thee, O God of Madurai, Salutations!"

Flood Crossed

The trumphal march of the Divine pilgrims had to cross a river in spate. No boat-man could venture into the flood. Sambandar seated his group in a boat and started singing. The boat sailed smoothly on to the

opposite shore where people received him with loud cheers. At another place he met Saribuddha in discussion, victoriously.

Appar Happy

Now came Tiruppugalur where St. Appar lived. Sambandar enquired where Appar was. "Here I am, pleased to bear your palanquin" exclaimed Appar. What a humility! Then Appar led the triumphant spiritual hero to his monastery and was delighted to hear from him the events that brought victory to Saivism at Madurai. Appar also related to Sambandar about his journey up the Himalayas, and the vision of Kailas at Tiru Iyaru.

Towards Madras

Visiting important temples on the way the Saviour of Saivism reached Sirkazhi. People gave him a delightful reception. Sambandar dedicated all his success to Siva Shakti who fed him with the Milk of Wisdom. He stayed in his home for a few days and then went onward towards Mylapore. He visited Thillai, Tiruvannamalai, and came to Tiru-ottur. Here devotees welcomed him warmly. Here, he converted the sterile palmyras of a devotee into fruitful ones. This was to meet the challenge of a heretic.

Sambandar visited Kanchipuram and spent there a few days of song-offering. Then he repaired to Tiru Alangadu where Karaikal Ammaiyar witnessed Siva's dance. Sambandar out of reverence for her, refrained from walking on foot in that soil. He sang a song to the presiding deity and went to Kalahasti. There he

worshipped Siva and Kannappar standing by his side. He went up the hill for worship. He mentally worshipped and offered songs to Siva up the Kailas, Kedarnath, Gokarnam and reached to Tiru-vottriyur. There he stayed a few days singing melodious songs on Thyagaraja. There Sivanesan from Mylapore met him.

O, Pumpavai !

Sivanesan was a rich merchant of Mylapore, an ardent devotee of Sambandar. He had a fair daughter called, Pumpavai. Sivanesan loved and adored Sambandar so passionately that he dedicated himself, his daughter, his home and wealth to that young Saint. The girl of twelve was shining in beauty like a gemmed lightning, like a florid golden creeper, like a lamp of divine splendour. He heard about the grand victory of Sambandar at Madurai and declared, "My daughter and my wealth are all for him, my Master". He raised a virgin-home for her in which he laid a beautiful garden. A girl of twelve, she always dreamt of Sambandar. But one day, while gathering flowers, a cobra bit her and its poison killed her. The merchant who wanted to mate her with Sambandar had to cremate her. He gathered her bones and ashes in a pot and placed the pot in the Virgin-home and covered it with her silk and ornaments. He expected Sambandar to perform a miracle and he did.

Sivanesan accorded a splendid reception to Sambandar at Mylapore. Sambandar knew the full story of Pumpavai. He visited Kapaliswarar temple, offered his songs and then requested Sivanesan to bring the relics of his daughter before the temple wall and place

it overlooking the luminous sanctum. He then addressed the astral body of Pumpavai in touching verses. Every stanza referred to a festival in the temple: "O Pumpavai, gone hast Thou without seeing these delightful festivals. Rise up, O fair Pumpavai, from the ashes, if it is true that the aims of human existence are feeding devotees of God and delighting in the sight of divine festivals."

Stanza by stanza saw the bones and ashes shaping themselves into a girl-now came the form, now head, now limbs, now fully robed and jewelled angel of twelve years charming with a divine splendour. There was a glow of divinity in her lotus eyes Her sight was set on her saviour Saint. She loved him like life. The father proposed her marriage with Sambandar. "But", said the Saint, "I have given life to her; she is like my daughter now, not wife." The girl was of course disappointed, but she remained a virgin all along, adoring Sambandar and reached the feet of God.

Marriage at Nallur

Sambandar left Mylapore and went to Chidambaram. His father met him there and led him home. There his marriage proposal came up. The Saint first refused the conjugal bondage. But Nambiandar Nambi of Nallur, a friend of Sivapadar, offered his fair daughter to Sambandar. The marriage was settled and ratified at Kazhi and grandly celebrated at Nallur. All the devotees of Sambandar attended the function. The son-in-law came in a pearl palanquin and entered the pearl-pavillion. Vedic hymns were chanted and conches blew. There were loud flourishes of drums, trumpets and

pipes and sonorous symphony of musical voices followed by instruments. Beauty and felicity vied with each other in making the auspicious day an eclat of splendour and spiritual serenity. Fair damsels brought golden pots, flowers, fruits, perfumeries, lamps, garlands and sprouting pots (Palikai). The bride was brought to the wedding pavilion, adorned with silk, gold and gems. The divine bride-groom of sixteen years was ceremonially wedded to the brillaint daughter of the pious Nambi.

Splendour Bursts Out

Sambandar wore Vibhuti and muttering Nama Sivaya. The bride adored his right side. Nila Nakka Nayanar officiated and chanted the mantras. Paanar, Murugar, Nambi, Sivapadar all blessed the divine souls who became one, soul-to-soul. The marriage badge was tied and Sambandar prayed God "Gracious God, let me attain at-one-ment. Let there be no more birth, no more bondage". He sang his last song (Kadalaki).

"Na-ma-si-va-ya! this is the redeeming sacred mantra, the true meaning of the four Vedas. Chant it with psychic love flowing with tears. It shall accord salvation. It shall bring felicity and beatitude. Death trembles before this mantra. It absolves all sins; it redeems souls from inferno and directs them to the blissful Paradise—Na-ma-si-va-ya!"

Liberation For All

The devotees kept on the chorus. Liberation for all! "Enter this splendour" declared Sambandar as an

effulgent light burst out like thousand suns and million lightnings. Flash! flash! flame! flame! Light, Light! The bride-groom, bride, parents, relatives, friends, sages, saints, all entered the heart of the flame which absorbed and consumed all, leaving a mystic void vibrating with the unique Mantra—Na-ma-si-va-ya!

Burst white ablaze, O Flame of God
Breaking the veils of mental mood
Raising Thy diamond peaks astraight
Consuming body and the Spirit
Ascend, O graceful golden flame
Granting our passing human game
A hymnal bliss of transcendence.
A splendid elan to existence.
Merge all, O embodied Jiva
Into the infinite Siva
A smiling flow of songful stream
Enters a sea of silent AUM...

———

29. Kalikama Nayanar

Tiru-Mangalam is a fair township on the north bank of the Cauveri. It is a place sanctified by the devotees of Siva. It is rich also in agriculture. The Eayarkone family there, has the military fame of commanding the Chola-army. Kalikkamar is the gem of the family devoted to God and God-lovers. He was angry with Sundaramurthi Nayanar for troubling Siva to negotiate with Paravainachiar. He declared vengeance against Sundarar. Sundarar came to know of this and prayed to Siva. Siva made Kalikamar suffer from colic pain and told him, "Sundarar alone can cure this". But Kalikkamar said: "Rather than allowing Sundarar to treat me, or touch me, it is better I commit suicide...." He stabbed himself and died. But the Grace of Siva revived him to new life and then he became the friend of Sundarar. We will see more of him in our account of St. Sundarar.

30. Tirumula Nayanar

Tirumular or Mula Yogi, ranks among the perfect yogic masters of Spiritual hierarchy. He is a saint, seer, poet, and a mystic of the beyond-beyond-plane of psychic consciousness. His name survives the nimbo of oblivion, gleaming with the stirring Truth "I am all-delight and let me share it with humanity." His realisations are embalmed in Tirumandram. This book contains gems of spiritual lustre taken from the mine of self-immersion and cut abright in the smithy of experience. Only ripe Yogins can delve into the esoterics of its mystic lines.

Scholars understand that Mular lived between A. D. 100 and 900. He was one of the Sivanatha siddhas that lived in Mt. Kailas. He was the disciple of Nandi Deva. His original name is not known. By the grace of Nandi he became a perfect yogin and commanded all Siddhars and attained the highest beatitude in which the soul united to God, enjoys untramelled bliss.

Pilgrim-Yogi

He was a friend of Sage Agastya who lived up the Podigai Hills in the Tirunelveli District.

The yogi set out to see the sage. On the way he bathed in the Ganges and other rivers; he visited all famous pilgrim centres Kedar, Nepal, Kasi, Tirupati, Kalahasti, Alangadu, Kanchi, Chidambaram where he

meditated for a few days. He was delighted with the cosmic dance of Siva in the heart of beings. He avoided sea coasts; for the sea gave poison to Siva which coloured His throat blue. So he travelled along the Cauveri bank and reached Tiru-Avadu-Turai. There he worshipped Pasupati and proceeded to Sattanur.

Enters Mula's Body

Sattanur is a fair green village cherished by the Cauveri. There was a simple shepherd in the village called Mulan, tending cows lovingly and devoting himself to faith in God. He was a pure soul and our yogin watched him keenly. One day the young shepherd died while tending the cows on the meadow. The cows gathered around his body shedding tears; for he loved them like life and his lute entertained them daily. Those animals mourned for their shepherd bitterly and would not graze even grass. The aged yogin saw their predicament and performed a miracle. He left his old body in a forest bush; his spirit entered the young body of the shepherd Mula and cheered the cows and played flute. The cows were delighted to see that young shepherd alive again. He tended them with great affection. He saw one spirit in all. He made them graze grass sumptuously, drink water in the Cauveri and drove them home after sunset. He handed over the kine to their respective owners but sat under a tree without entering home.

The Wife Cries

Mulan had a young wife who loved him dearly. His wife found him there and fondly entreated him to

come home. She did not know that in the body of her husband, the soul of a Himalayan Sage had entered. She touched him and he resisted her from approaching him. "Alas, my husband! what has become of you?" cried the lady. 'I am not your husband; I have no wife, no home, no attachments", assured he, as he entered a monastery near by and steeped himself in meditation.

The perturbed wife went into the village and wailed out her grievences wildly crying, "O, my husband has deserted me ....Some one has confused his mind. Come friends, to bring him to senses; come relatives, to plead for me. Come sorcerers, to make him normal." The villagers gathered to see what became of Mulan.

The Sage In Mula's Body

A wise man spoke to Mulan sensibly and found out he was a Siddha. He revealed the truth saying, "Shepherd Mulan is dead. The spirit of a Sage has entered his body. This is that Sage in Mulan's garb. No word, no thought can moot his state which transcends understanding. He is engrossed in the Self to fulfill a mission; do not disturb him." The head of the monastery stood a guard for him. The wife too left him to himself and went home.

Under The Bo-Tree

Sage Mula went with the cows to find his body. He could not find it. And so he had to carry Mulan's body which is just a tenement of the Spirit. His Jiva was immersed in Siva-consciousness. His being was drowned in Self-bliss. He was silent in trance. He told his

brother shepherds that he was a sage in spirit and repaired to Tiru-Avadu-Turai, worshipped Siva there, and sat in superconscious trance under a Bo-tree west of the temple walls. He noted all his revelations in quatrains and gave the world the great Tiru-mandiram (Mantra Malai). Mular recorded his spontaneous intuitions all his life. He says, "By the grace of Nandi, my Master, I sought Mula and entered into him. By his grace I attained eternal Bliss. By his grace, I became the Light of Knowledge and settled as the Self in my heart. Siva is the mantra that has possessed my being."

Sage Mular was a fount of Bliss
Upon the dizzy height of HIS.
A blazing Power of word in trance,
He inspired cosmic renaissance.
He sparked out soul-deep mysteries,
And his psychic discoveries
To brighten hopes of high delight
In Life Divine of peace and light.

31. Dandi Adigal

Blind Sage

Dandi Adigal was born in the holy Arur. He felt the dance of Nataraja always in his heart. He was blind. He did not like to see the sensual world. He uttered the five letters (Na-ma-si-va-ya) with each breath and heard the jingling feet of the Inner Dancer.

Digs A Tank

He never failed to go to the temple every day. He wished to show his love in service. One can see him before the thousand pillared Devasiriya Mantapam, uttering the Siva mantra. There was a colony of Jains, west of the temple. Dandi wanted to dig a tank there for the public good, and as a humble service to God. But how can a purblind man work with the spade? But behold our Nayanar!

He stuck a central post and roped the area. He tied a guiding rope and carried on his spade work muttering in his heart "Namasivaya, Namasivaya!" Day and night, the blind devotee did his consecrated work.

Jains Give Trouble

The Jains objected to his digging: "It is a sin; it will kill so many small lives, worms and insects" they said. The Nayanar insisted on his work and the Jains desisted him.

They: You blind man, are you deaf too. You do not understand our Ahimsa Dharmam.

He: I hear you sir. Your ears are closed to God's voice! I do the work of God.

They: If your God restores your sight, we will leave you free—

He: God's power is infinite. He will give me sight again— Then you will lose your sight.

They: If such a miracle is shown by your God, we will leave this place for Him, and go away.

The Nayanar dug and dug! but the Jains snatched off his spade, pulled down the posts and took away the ropes and insulted him—

"Pine not, Good Soul"

The Nayanar spent a night of agony and prayer. God appeared in his dream and encouraged him saying, "Pine not, good soul, we will restore your sight and fulfill your mission." Simultaneously God came in the dream of the king and told him "Help my devotee Dandi. He digs a tank for me. Help him against opposing forces." The king woke up and worshipped God. In the morning he saw Dandi and heard the whole story. "Do not be anxious, good man. The tank shall be sunk and the opposers shall funk. Regain your sight first and every thing shall become strait" said the king.

O Siva!

Dandi went to the temple and prayed God thus: "O Siva, Thou hast swallowed poison, Thou hast

burnt by laughter, the three winged-Demon-forts! O All powerful Mercy, restore my sight. Thy feet are my only refuge. Help me to make a big tank in your name. Let me behold you, if my hold on thy feet is true."

Sight Restored

A miracle happened. The Nayanar kept on muttering the five letter-mantra as he bathed in the tank. He rose up from a dip.—Lo! His eyes saw clearly. "Gratitude, O Saviour Siva, my gracious Lord—I now see Thy temple and Thy image— I go anon to my work."

The king was surprised. He called the Jains and said, "God has given sight to our Nayanar. Now, you must leave this place."

Mission Fulfilled

The place was thus cleared for the service of Dandi Nayanar. He gladly bent to work with added strength and vigour and fulfilled his mission. He made one of the biggest temple tanks and it is known to-day as Kamalalayam Tank. There is also a small temple in the middle of the tank. The example of this Nayanar brings out the great Truth that Faith fulfils aspirations. God's Grace gives sight to the blind and strength to the weak

32. Murkha Nayanar

How many varieties of devotees come before us! Behold here is a gambler, a rude man who has angry sword to hit wrong doers. His very name is Murkha, the ruffian. He lived in Tiruverkadu, a pilgrim centre immortalised in the hymns of Sambandar. It is on the north bank of Palar river in the Tondainadu which is noted for wise men and devotees.

Murkha Nayanar was an ardent lover of the Lord who swallowed poison so that Gods can eat nectar. He took pleasure in serving his devotees. He was ready to help them with all the money, he earned from gambling. Devotees swarmed in his house. He fed them first before he took his food. His name and fame spread far and wide.

He spent and spent in charity until his hands were empty and until poverty alone was left in his house. But his enthusiasm to serve and feed devotees did not abate. By any means, he resolved to keep on his charity.

He gambled and gambled until there was none at Tiruverkadu to challenge him. Hence he went to other places to earn enough for his munificence.

He came at last to Kumbakonam (Tiru Kudanthai) and played dice with the expert gamblers there. He won sumptuously. But he hit with a sword those who played him false or who proved dishonest; for this, he

was called fierce, Murkha. He dedicated everything he won to feed devotees of Siva and took their leavings.

This good service expiated him from sins and his true love made him a real Saint, worthy of God's Grace. His image is worshipped in the local temple.

Self-less love, devoid of I-and-mine egoism, brings salvation.

All his earnings
All his yearnings
All his efforts
All his comforts
His thoughts and deeds
Served the needs
Of these who loved
Siva and moved
In his grace—
Always !

33. Somasi Mara Nayanar

Tiruvambar is a flourishing hamlet in the fertile Cholanadu. Somasimara Nayanar was famous in this place for his Vedic culture, virtuous life and fervent service to God-lovers. His heart lived in God and his hand in serving his devotees. He was equal-minded in helping all. He did his acts of charity pronouncing the five lettered mantra. He loved St. Sundarar next to God and often saw him at Arur.

His love for Sundarar and his hymns grew everyday, to the extent of bringing him to settle permanently at Tiru Arur, for the intimate service of Sundarar. He sang Sundarar's Thevarams and lived his teachings and at last attained salvation.

34. Sakkiya Nayanar

Can you imagine a devotee pelting God with stones and getting His Grace? God's Grace flows in many ways and who can command His Will?

Behold Sakkiya Nayanar of Tiru-Changa-mangai. He was an agriculturist. But he aspired for a higher life of moral purity. He studied the ethics of Buddhism at Kanchipuram and cultivated compassion for all beings. He poured over the Dhammapada but that was not enough for his seeking hunger. His craving for wisdom was satisfied by a deep study of Saivism. The act must have an actor and a giver for the fruit of actions. God Siva was everything—the deed, doer and the giver of good. He cultivated moral purity by studying Buddhism and God love by studying Saivism. He adored Sivalingam as the best symbol of Siva, containing all tatvas (reals) in it. He adored the Lingam in his heart's sanctum. He was attracted to the external form of Sivalingam. But there was an eccentricity in his worship. He affectionately threw a stone at the Lingam instead of a soft flower. The Lingam stood in an open space under the vast blue canopy. The merciful Siva was pleased with Sakkiya's stones, just as a mother is pleased with the silly strokings of her child. Perhaps this was to hoodwink Buddhists who may think that their Sakkiyan was so faithful to Buddha that he pelted stones at the God of another religion.

One day he sat for dinner without pelting the Lingam with a stone. The thing came to his mind and he

hurried to the place with a stone and aimed at the Lingam. His eyes were wet with tears; his heart was moved by emotion. He stood motionless. Siva appeared with Uma to bless his sincerity. Sakkiya saw a beautiful vision of Siva Shakti and tears of ecstasy rolled from his eyes.

Sakkiya's example inculcates the need for unceremonial love for God. Sincerity is superior to sanctimony.

God accepts even stone as flower
Offered by love with heart's fervour.

———

35. Sirappuli Nayanar

Tiruvakkur is a Brahmin village fed by the Cauveri. Vedic rhythms roared there like thunder rains. Haven-fumes and agar-fumes rose to heavens. It was a village praised by Jnana Sambandar. Sirappuliar was a Vedic scholar of the place. He was respected by all, for his loving heart and liberal hand. He took delight in receiving devotees under his hospitable roof and in feeding them heartily. He was engrossed in Siva mantra and Sivapuja. Service to sincere lovers of God was an expression of his God-love. By this merit he was drawn closer and closer to God's grace until he was absorbed into it. To love God and live His scripture, are the two wings of devotion.

36. Siruthonda Nayanar

The most pathetic, popular story in Periapuranam is that of Siruthondar. It is a horripulating account of love and sacrifice, the like of which the world has never seen. God-love and sacrifice are the seal and symbol of sainthood. But Siruthondar's love of God-lovers, is soulful and his sacrifice dreadful and terrific. The story of his glory is celebrated even in Maharashtra. Now listen:

Tiru Chengattangudi is a famous spiritual centre and its temple Ganapatiswaram attracts thousands of devotees. It is a beautiful and blissful town nourished by the Cauveri. Its fields ring with folk songs of peasant women and its streets hum with holy hymns.

Paranjoti is the gem of the town. He hails from a progeny of physicians. He was a very learned man, a man of arts and sciences, a brave soldier and an army commander. He was famous for his chivalry. His hands wielded the sword skillfully. He was a lion in the battle-field. None excelled him in horsemanship.

But at heart, he was a psychic lover of God, and a faithful servant of his devotees. He never ate before feeding a Sage or Saint. He searched for them every day. His soul lived in God and his heart lived in Saints. His mind lived in *Siva* and his body lived in Seva (service). Paranjoti was the private Adviser of the king and the General of his army. He led many military expeditions with success. The king showered

honours and titles on him and gave him the first place in his court. His name made history in the heroic seige of Vatapi which he reduced to dust and brought fabulous booties and spoils of war. The king honoured him richly and bowed before his spiritual eminence. He repented his folly in sending such a saint to war-field. A sword in a saint's hand, a sage in a bloody field, a merciful benefactor of mankind engaged in merciless battles are anomalies and contradictions. The king knew his passion for the Divine and his great devotion to God-lovers. Of course, he was fearless as a hero in the battle-field. But his natural field was spiritual service. He was born to establish peace and not to shed blood in wars. There was a prick in his conscience over the blood he had shed in wars. "Go and continue your divine service at home for which I give you plenty of resources" said the king, as he rewarded his heroism and awarded enough for his future peace service.

With this economic stability, he repaired to Chengattangudi and was engrossed in his services to Siva and Jivas. His consecration to the Divine and Divine Saints was so perfect that people called him Siru Thondar, the humble servant of devotees. He told people that he was the humblest of the humble and hence he was known as Siruthondan and that name became memorable in the history of sainthood.

But he was not a lonely ascetic. He married a beautiful and dutiful wife, called Tiru Venkattu Nangai after he left the king's service, to help him in his spiritual ventures. They begot a very charming child named *Siralan.* His birth ceremony and his tonsure, ceremony were celebrated grandly and he was put to school.

Everything was happy about him and the happiness reached the climax, when he had the delight of welcoming Jnanasambandar to that place and entertaining him and his followers as his divine guests. Jnana sambandar praised him in a verse. Siruthondar daily visited the local Ganapatiswaram Temple and worshipped Siva there and also came in contact with saints whom he took home and fed them to his heart's satisfaction.

God planned a severe test and ordeal to show to the world His devotional fervour. He became a terrible Kapali-Bhirava-mendicant. His black wild matted hair curled like black rain clouds and white Tumba flowers shone there like stars and lightnings. A silver white crescent mark was effulgent between his brows. His ear shells hung like sun and moon with blood-red flowers. A chain of crystals hid his blue throat. Like a dark night spreading over the ruddy dusk, elephant skin covered his coral body. Chains and bracelets of sea-shells adorned his limbs. The anklets jingled a call to human beings, for surrender at His feet, the sole refuge of weak mental creatures. The left hand held a skull and the right hand a petty drum. A trident leaned on his shoulders. Bracelets covering his feet tinkled His glory. Smiles beamed out his grace; fire flashed from his eyes. He entered Tiruchengattangudi awful, august, hiding in his heart a lovely compassion. It was love in frightful colours. It was an awe-inspiring majesty of divine splendour.

He was hungry and thirsty and found out Siruthondar's house enquiring passers by. "Is there Siru thondar who feeds Saints, at Home?" cried he. The servant maid Sandananangai came running and said,

"Come in venerable Sir, our master Siruthondar, has gone in search of a Saint, for he never eats without feeding a holy man." "We cannot enter a home where women alone live," responded the Saint, sounding his drum. The house-wife ran forth and requested the great Saint to sit in the hall, until her husband who had left in search of Saints, returned. The Saint rejected the request and said "We come from the North to see the famous Siruthondar. In his absence we can't enter his house. We will be waiting for him under the ebony tree, inside Ganapatiwaram temple; direct him there." He went away.

In a few minutes, Siruthondar returned, tired of a fruitless search for Saints. The wife at once told him about the Kapali and he ran with delight to invite him. He saw the Kapali and fell at his feet.

Kapali: Are you the great-small servant of devotees?

Siru: They call my humble self like that. I wandered in search of a Saint and am pleased to see you, Sir. Please bless my home and partake our offering. You will be hungry now.

Kapali: Yes; but I eat only once in six months and today I must eat; but I want the flesh of a pasu; without that, my hunger cannot be appeased.

Siru: Very well, Sir, we have cows. Please come and choose one and we will cook for you its meat.

Kapali: Ha Ha Ha! Pasu is not cow. My Pasu is sisu—a boy of five years, a fine perfect tender

human being (Narapasu). But can you do as I desire.

Siru: Readily Sir, we have such a lovely child of five years.

Kapali: But my further condition may cause you pain.

Siru: No Sir. To satisfy a Saint, I can dare anything; go on, Sir.

Kapali: The boy must be the only son of his parents—a dear child.

Siru: All right-agreed.

Kapali: The mother must hold him; the father must cut and slice him with joy—both without shedding a drop of tears.

Siru: Agreed, agreed!

Kapali: That human flesh must be nicely cooked for my lunch.—Would you do it?

Siru: We shall at once do it, Sir, as you say. Please grace our home.

Kapali: Prepare the dish as I said, and call me. I will be waiting for you here.

Siruthondar saluted the strange canibal Saint and hurried home and told his wife that the great Saint wanted the curry of a boy of five years.

The wife thought over it. No mother will allow her only child to be cut and cooked like that. "Let us

offer our own dear Siralan to appease the Saint's half-yearly hunger" said the wife.

The father ran to the school, saw his dear Sirala studying there. With the teacher's permission, he brought him home on his shoulders and left him before the mother. Both looked at him with fond eager sympathy. They would not kiss or embrace him for that would defile his body. The mother bathed him clean and adorned him with the richest silk and ornaments while the father was wheting the knife and his tears of joy was wetting the body. He told the boy "My only son, my darling, today you are going to satisfy the hunger of a great holy Saint." The boy felt happy. There was no trace of sorrow on any face. The gentle mother took the boy to a private room caught hold of his tender hands, placing him on her lap. The father took his sharp knife and cut the head of the dear boy saying "Siva Siva." The maid took away the head and the body was sliced and nicely cooked tastefully with spices. The mother prepared a variety of dishes. The food was ready. The father ran to the temple and informed the Bhairava, "Deign to dine, Sir, the food is ready as you desired—my boy's flesh nicely cooked. "Alright very well", said the mystic Saint and he followed the father. The mother brought water to wash his feet. They adored his feet with flowers, waved camphor light and welcomed him in. The holy water, that washed the Saint's feet was sprinkled all over the house. The Saint was seated high. After due adorations, the dishes were brought.

Kapali: You must mix all together. We take only a mono-diet.

That was done. Again the mystic Saint demanded "Have you cooked all parts of the child?

Siru: All except the hair and head.

Kapali: Head too we will eat. Have you not cooked it?

Again they were confused; but the servant maid brought the head cooked and the brain of the child well dressed and spiced.

Siru: Now serve yourself august Sir.

Kapali: But we do not eat alone. Bring a Saiva-saint to dine with me.

(Alas-Siruthondar searched and none was available.)

Kapali: Alright. You are a Saint, you sit with me and partake of the same food.

(Ah—how can a father eat the curry cooked out of his son's flesh! Test, test, What next!

A separate leaf was spread for the father and he touched the food—)

Kapali: Stop—why are you in a hurry. We eat after six months. Now let your son come and join us.

Siru: Alas Sir! He will be of no use now!

Kapali: I say, go out and call him! Go with your wife to the street and call him.

The father and the mother went to the street and called anxiously with all their parental love:

"O Sirala, Sirala, our darling boy—come! come! come! come to share the lunch. The Saint awaits you—come—"

Wonder! miracle! surprize! A voice was heard "Ah Mother—I am coming!" It is really their darling's voice! "Where are you, O dear child" "Here—Om Sivam" said the boy, running to the bosom of the mother. The mother fondly embraced him and kissed him and handed him to the father. "Are you alive my boy, come in, the Saint is waiting for you with hunger."

The three entered the dining hall but, where is the august Saint! The Saint vanished! Dishes vanished! They ran helter-skelter, hither and thither in vain! Suddenly flowers showered from the blue above! Vedic hymns filled the void. Sirala first looked up and exclaimed: Behold father, mother—up there, a splendour. They looked up and lo Uma-Sivam on the white bull blessed them. They were reborn in that heavenly splendour—Father, mother, child, maid and the whole household enjoyed Divine bliss!

Now what does this terrible sacrifice mean? Is Siva an eater of human flesh? How was the child cut and dressed and cooked, revived? Is it by any Sanjivini mantra just as Sukra did in the story of Devayani? Was there any magic behind this tale of child-curry? Siruthondar as a warrior must have cut several heads in the field. Is cutting of his boy with his hands an expiation for past sins?

None of these answer our curiosity. God's Will was done! Obey that and everything ends well! This is the lesson we learn from this story of terriffic mystery.

37. Cheraman Perumal (Kazharitrarivar)

Kodung Kolur is the beautiful capital of the Cheras otherwise called Kodais. The town reverberated with flute and lute voices, trumpet sounds, cavalcades elephant-roars, temple prayers, Vedic chants and many other auspicious sounds. Arts and sciences flourished in the city. Charity homes rang with praises of contentment. Mutts brimmed with Saiva hymns. The green smiles of nature bore golden fruits. Homes were joyful; hearts were peaceful.

There was a superman among the Cheras known as *Perumakkodai*. He was magnanimous, head to foot. He enshrined Siva in his heart and lived in Siva-consciousness. He dedicated himself entirely to the worship of Siva at Tiruvanjaikalam Temple and relegated all mundane relations.

After morning ablutions, he gathered fresh buds and flowers wove fine garlands and offered them to the priest. He kept the temple premises clean and tidy. He was ready to serve the Divine in every way. His tongue sang the hymns of Siva.

It now happened that the Chera King relinquished the crown and kingdom and repaired to the forest to do tapasya. The ministers requested Perumakkodai to take his place and rule over the land. "How can I think of state affairs, when spiritual delight has overwhelmed me? Any how I shall wait at the feet of Siva, for his

oracle" replied Perumal. Siva ordered him to rule over the land and maintain justice. God gave him the gift of knowing flawlessly all hearts and also the spoken sound of the animal world. Hence, he was called "Faultless knower of minds and words" (Kazharitru Arivar). God granted him invincible power, strength, the virtue of liberal giving, strong victorious army and Perumal agreed to rule over the country. Ministers felt happy. The chosen king worshipped Siva, and came to the palace on the decorated state elephant. All auspicious paraphernalia followed him in loud tumult. A washerman came in sight. His body was white with washing earth. Perumal saw him, thought he donned vibhuti, got down the elephant and saluted him. The poor puzzled washerman cried "O king, I am a humble dobhi, your poor subject, unworthy of your salutations." The king said "I am your humble Cheran. Whoever you may be, your body is smeared with holy ashes. You are sacred. Go and be happy." All people praised the devotion of the king towards Siva Bhaktas and Vibhuti, the symbol of Saivism. The carnation ceremony was grandly celebrated. Perumal made his subjects pious, peaceful and active. He extended his hands of friendship to the Chola and Pandya Kings.

His prime duty was worship of Nataraja with light, flowers, perfumeries, offerings and hymns. His devotional fervour went so high that he could hear daily jingling of the feet of the cosmic Dancer, Nataraja.

There was a staunch devotee of Siva at Madurai. His name was Panabhadra. Poverty afflicted him and he prayed God for relief. God gave him a recommendation letter and directed him to Cheraman Perumal at

Kodumkolur. The poor devotee went on foot to the Chera's capital and just then the Cheraman heard the voice of Siva in a dream. "My devotee Panabhadra has come to you. Give him plenty" Cheraman ran to the gate, saluted the devotee, Panabhadra and led him to his Puja room. Pana gave him Siva's letter which read as follows:

"I am Siva of Alavoi, my high walled city. White Swans play in its lotus tanks. Your heart is liberal in gifts like winter clouds. You give plenty of gold to poets. O Perumal, sitting under the moon-like umbrella, the lute-player Panabhadra is my lover even like you. He has come to seek your patronage. Honour him and send him with sufficient riches."

Cheraman was delighted to read God's letter. He copied it, placed it in his shrine room, paid his tributes to God and heaped before Panabhadra his royal wealth. "Take all, take, O Pana" said the king humbly. But Pana took just enough from the heap, saying "I am not ambitious. So much is enough. Keep the rest with you. O king, thanks." The king gave him more wealth, placed him on the state elephant and sent him to Madurai with state honours.

One fair day, during his Puja, he heard the usual tinkling anklets of Nataraja late by a few minutes. He came to know by intuition and the Divine voice, that Nataraja was engrossed in listening to the Thevaram of Saint Sundarar at Chidambaram and hence there was delay. He was attracted to Sundarar so much that he left the state affairs into the hands of his Cabinet ministers and went fast to Chidambaram, adored Nataraja and saw Saint Sundarar and gave him a hearty welcome.

Both of them-visited Madurai and other holy places in the Pandyan Kingdom and returned to Arur. Thence Sundarar accompanied Cheraman to Kodumkolur. There he stayed a few months under the royal patronage and then returned to Tiru-Arur for a few days stay; thence went back to Kodumkolur.

A few months passed in spiritual delight. St. Sundarar mounted the white elephant while the Cheraman followed him the horse. "Move in the world, mind in God. He is in your heart." This is their message to humanity.

The two great lovers of God flew towards Kailas to live with Siva there and their song filled the atmosphere:

Let our life breathe in Thee
O Lord of our being,
Let our hands worship Thee
O Sun of our seeing.
Let our mind think of Thee
And our heart be Thy love
Let our soul taste the honey
Of Thy grace here and now

Hail Siva!

38. Gananatha Nayanar

Gananathar hailed from the fertile Sirkazhi which gave birth to Jnanasambandar. He was a family man an equal minded Vaidic and an authority in Agamas. He was a Vedic scholar. He trained scholars in service to God's devotees. Besides erudition, he was an expert in weaving garlands, cherishing flower gardens, and doing all services that temples needed.

Good look brought him the friendship of Jnana Sambandar, the victorious Apostle of Saivism. Sambandar too loved him and by his grace Gananathar got his place among the Sivaganas by doing his natural duties and by living a life dedicated to God.

St. Tirumular says :

"Lord and Love are two" say the ignorant. None, understands Love that becomes the Lord. When they know the Love that is the Lord, they go on loving feeling the Lord in love. O deluded men that seek God in heaven, The sweetness in honey—is it red or black? Behold the sweetness that dominates honey—Even so God is hidden in bodies. He is not tainted by the mind.

39. Kutruva Nayanar

Kutru in Tamil means the God of death. There was a strong hero who faced even death in serving God-lovers. To wrong-doers, he gave a death blow. He was the chieftain of Tiru Kalandai and he adored Siva-with-trident. He got strength and energy by uttering the name of Siva day and night. He commanded, cars, elephants, horses and infantries. He had strong mind, strong shoulders, strong arms and a strong army. Opponents were routed at the sway of his sword. After making his conquests and building up a big territory, he requested the Priests of Tillai to crown him. They refused on the plea that they were accustomed to crown the Chola king's alone. They left Tillai afraid of his anger and settled in the land of Cheras, leaving only one family at Chidambaram for the temple service.

This refusal opened the eyes of the Nayanar. He controlled the desire for a golden crown. He invoked Nataraja to crown him with his uplifted feet. God granted his aspiration and planted on his head his blessed foot. He praised the lotus foot of the Lord and made people adore Nataraja and take refuge at His Saviour foot, uplifted to protect devotees.

He lived long holding the rod of justice in his strong hands. His kingdom prospered in peace and plenty.

He reached Divine bliss by dint of strong willed devotion.

40. Poi Adimai Illada Pulavar

This Tamil heading means Savants who are not slaves of untruth. They were true to their conscience. Some maintain that the term referred to St. Manicka Vachakar. Sekkizhar says they were slaves of no hostile creeds. All scriptures lead to the knowledge of God, the Sat (Eakam Sat) the unique Truth. Those who were true to this Truth heart and soul, are genuine lovers and servitors of God.

Their poetry was not defiled by human desires. They praised God alone for they were His servants, His savants and His artists. Poems offered to God alone become immortal treasures of mankind. They are God-worthy poems. Others disappear in the whirling dust of oblivion.

41. Pugal Chola Nayanar

Uraiyur (near Tiruchirapalli) is the ancient capital of the Chola Kingdom. It is famous in the history of the Tamilnadu. Its ancient kings had the renown of having engraved their Tiger Flag on the Himlayan peak. Uraiyur is a splendid repository of every thing bright, beautiful and blissful. The flags on its turrets rise to the sky. It challenges the city of Indra in enjoyments. Its market places are busy with commerce and they swell with rich luxurious goods. Elephants gather there like black nimbus. The frothing steeds are like the foaming sea. Its damsels are fair like vernal bowers. Its streets thunder with running cars. Clouds cloud round its high turrets. The sun kisses its tall trees; wind plays with its fragrant flower gardens. Its fame spreads on all directions. Nations hail its opulent splendour. Guardians of the Cauveri lands rule over this city. It was once ruled by the ancestors of Anabaya-chola the patron of Sekkizhar who made Chidambaram, a beautiful city. The present king Pugazh Cholan is a proud Scion of the dynasty who unified the holy land under its cool umbrella. Kings obeyed his commands. The rod of justice was straight in his hands. Saivism flourished under his patronage and people were pious, god-fearing agile and active. Holy ashes adorned their faces. The temple services went on systematically. This king changed his capital to Karur. He worshipped God in the temple and sat on his throne in the council hall. Chieftains of Coorg and West Coast brought him rich tributes of gold, pearls and elephants and returned with

his awards and rewards. He had a majestic control over his vassels.

We have already stated in the story of Eripatta Nayanar, how this king offered himself to be cut with his sword for the rudness of his state elephant which scattered in the dust the puja-flowers of Sivakamiandar. His fame as a devotee of Siva rose high. He had his life and breath in love and service of Siva and his devotees. Here is an instance of his terrible sacrifice:

Adigan of Malai Nadu was too proud to pay his tributes. He held sway over a hill-fort and thought himself invincible. The Chola sent a strong army which returned with victory-trumpets, rich spoils and also a collection of heads slain in the thick of the fight. One head had matted hair and holy ashes. "Ah I have sinned; This is really a siva bhakta. Alas! what a sin! what a sin! what a cruelty!" he cried shedding tears and trembling with grief. "It is not a noble victory! It is an ignoble treachery. Shame! Shame! My life is not worth living." Rebel-conscience half-killed him.

He called his ministers and gave his son his crown and sceptre. He advised his son to carry on the state administration as a service to Nataraja. He then raised a huge fire, smeared his body with holy ashes, went round the flaming pyre muttering "Nama Sivaya, Nama Sivaya." He bore on his head the braided severed head and jumped into the wild fire. He reached the feet of Nataraja tinkling with anklets. People wondered crying "What a sacrifice! What an atonement! What a devotion to duty!" The celestials showered flowers of blessings! The Lord gave his soul peace at His feet raised to save his lovers.

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42. Narasinga Munaia Nayanar

Holy ashes are sacred. Those who wear it are adorable whatever be their birth, pedigree or behaviour. They are worthy of respect-such was the faith of King Narasinga of Tiru Munaipadi (South Arcot Dist.)

He was a fervent lover of Siva and his devotees. He held his sceptre to protect Saivism. This king was the kind foster parent of St. Sundarar. He grandly celebrated pujas and festivals. He fed Siva-bhaktas during the Tiruvadirai festival and gave each devotee hundred gold pieces.

On such an occasion, a man came bright with ashes on his front. But people avoided his contact for he was a lecher, a lewd, and a sinner. Narasinga saw him, left his throne, raised his hands in salutations before him and spoke to him:

"I am very happy to see you, bright with holy ashes in your face" and gave him doubly two hundred gold pieces. The ash-faced hypocrite certainly felt his littleness. His conscience pricked him and he lived a reformed life of god-love and god-service worthy of his ashed face.

Narasinga's loving sympathy gave a new impetus to Saivism.

43. Adi Patta Nayanar

Consecration in any humble capacity is the key note of Divine love. Behold this fisherman Adipattan of Nagapatinam.

Nagapatinam is a rich sea port busy with shipping trade. It is a fadeless flower in the celestial tree of the Cauveri land. Its high mansions are lofty shining with the presence of the goddess of prosperity. Fair damsels with honeyed blossoms adorning their tresses, play Ammanai balls on the terraces. Horses and tuskers move in the streets like tossing billows.

Let us pass from the town area to hamlets on the sea shore. They are mostly occupied by fishermen. The most prominent among them was Adipattan a fervent devotee of Siva. The net was his means of living. He spread it widely in the sea and hauled up fishes. He observed a vow of consecrating the best big fish to God by leaving it back into the waves. Even if one fish alone came into the net he left it into the sea and returned home empty handed. Destiny tested him. For many days only one fish came into his net. He left it in the sea and had no fish for his dish. The test came one day when a heavy thing came in his net. It was a golden fish studded with rich gems and diamonds. Adipatta was not tempted by gold and diamonds. He left it back into the waves saying "Reach god's golden feet." He kept his vow against chill penury. Heavens rained showers of flowers upon this honest devotee. Born low, his mind was high. God shed his grace upon him.

Consecration brings spiritual consummation.

44. Kalikamba Nayanar

The least arrogance, the least prejudice shall impede Divine Grace. Kalikamba would not tolerate the least negligence in serving devotees of God.

He was born at Pennadam which is the eye of the Cholanadu. It is a town of holy men and rich merchants, all pure in divine virtue. They were devoted to Siva. Kalikamban was born in such a house of merchants. He was attached to Siva in the local temple, known by the name Tunganaimadam. He took delight in inviting Siva Bhaktas, washing their feet, adoring them with flower and feeding them with choice dishes.

There was a servant under him. He misbehaved and so he was sent out. After a few years the same servant returned in a holy guise. Perhaps there was an inner transformation in him. Kalikamban saluted him welcome. After washing the feet of other Saints, Kalikamban invited this man. But his wife stood with arrogant neligence delaying water to wash the feet of an old servant of the house. Her hesitation enraged Kalikamban. He took his knife and cut off her bangle hand. It fell off jingling with bangles. "Off arrogance!", he cried and took the water-pot himself to wash the feet of the former servant. Then he fed all the devotees, including the former servant. No master, no servant-they meet on equal levels when their hearts are set in the Unique One.

God sent his Grace and blessed the staunch lover of His devotees. Perhaps He restored the hand of the wife too.

45. Kalia Nayanar

Let us now come to Tiru-vottriyur, a suburb near Madras. It is an important Saivite centre full of mutts and mantapams humming with holy hymns. Its theatres jingle with dances of fair artists. Nourishing food for mendicants flows in its inns. Its atmosphere breathes with the fragrance of marine blossoms. White sand like moon light is spread on the seashore and it is a pleasure to sit there in contemplation.

There, in the oil-mongers' street, lived a very good soul named Kalia Nayanar devoted to the service of Siva. He was an oil merchant of purity and probity. The temple of Thyagaraja at Tiruvottriyur attracted his heart. He used to light there hundreds of oil lamps. He spent all his wealth in his lamp service.

The test came when all his resources were spent and he became poor. But his life was purified day by day and his heart loved God all the more. He bought oil from other merchants and sold them. He used the gain for his service. This too failed. He drove the oil mill on daily wages and spent the money to purchase oil for the temple, or he received oil as wages. This too could not continue. The family starved in the street but the service went on. This too got exhausted in a year. But the will to serve persisted. There was none to help him. Lo! the last test came. He took a knife to shed his blood in the oil cans and to light lamps with his blood as oil. He just applied the knife to his throat when a mysterious hand prevented him. A splendour burst out, showering upon him the Divine Grace from above.

Be resolved to serve God; you will deserve the Divine Grace.

46. Shakti Nayanar

Shakti Nayanar is an example of fanatic and frantic passion for Siva. He was an agriculturist at Virinjai in the Cauveri land. He was very strong physically and mentally. "Adore Siva alone; speak of Him alone or your tongue shall be cut off." This was his declaration. Any one speaking ill of God or God's servitors, he would pull his tongue with a pair of tongs and chop it with his knife.

His heroic devotion brought the descent of the Grace and his salvation was a matter of course.

So, let us remember God and avoid speaking of anti-divine words or movements.

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47. Iyadigal Kadavarkone

Kadavars are Pallavas. Iyadigal belonged to the Pallava dynasty. He was the king of Kanchi. He led a strong army and conquered all his enemies and established his kingdom firmly. But he did not find peace from his throne. The crown weighed him down heavily. Cares and anxieties drove him to renunciation. He saw the tragi-comic-illusion around him. Hence he gave the kingdom to his son and dedicated his life to pilgrimage and song-offering. He went from temple to temple. He sang in Venba metre and his poems come next to the poems of Karaikal Ammaiyar as the Eleventh Holy Book of Saivism. These are the truths embalmed in his 24 Venbas available now.

"O my good heart, when age enfeebles you and you cannot move briskly, your relatives neglect you and dotage grips you and necks you down to the grave yard; unite your soul to Siva in Thillai. Before old age bends your back and you take staggering steps on a staff, take refuge at the feet of Him who kicked off death. Before your voice fails, your heart-beat stops, people call you a corpse and your wife says "remove this body to the cremation yard, think, O, man, of the saviour feet of Siva. Before eagles eat your flesh, be eager to hail God and attain His Grace. Before your hair, black like a cuckoo, becomes white like a crane, if you do not think of God, your life shall be a disappointment, a pitiable sight of weakness and fatigue. Fair damsels who loved you then, detest you now. From your proud home they take you to the cremation yard. Before you are reduced to such wretched state, take refuge at the feet of the Omnipotent Divine"

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48. Kanampulla Nayanar

Are you prepared to do the utmost sacrifice on the spiritual line? Then God's Grace seeks you. Behold Kanampullar of Irukki velur, a flourishing town on the southern bank of the Vellaru.

He was rich and prosperous. He was pious, gentle, wise, compassionate and firm in divine faith. He did not set any value on the passing wealth of the changing world. He abided in the lasting wealth at the feet of Nataraja. He laid his hope on the eternal wealth of His Grace. He lit lamps in temples and spent all his resources in this service. He gave his all in this luminous charity until poverty alone was left to his lot. He went to Chidambaram and felt a new strength in his soul. He began his lighting service in the temple of Tirupuliavaram nearby. This is the place where Vyagrapada lived in inner communion with Nataraja. Kanampullar's last pie was spent in the light-service. The problem of the morrow, seriously engaged his thought. He hated begging for oil. Hence he took to the dignity of labour. He cut grass and from its sale, kept lamps burning in the temple. One day the grass bundle did not secure a sale. But his service did not fail. He made dried grass into small faggots and torches to give light. They too burnt out when he was pulling his hair to feed the flames. Ah! what a daring sacrifice, what a strong will to do his duty! His ego, desire and karmas too were burnt in the flame of divine fervour! God blessed his genuine love and resolve in the service of light and blessed the devotee with the Light of His Grace. Sacrifice brings divine success!

49. Kari Nayanar

Kari Nayanar was a pious Brahmin well versed in the Vedic lore. He lived in the famous pilgrim centre of Tiru - Virattanam where Markandeyar attained immortality. He was an erudite poet. He composed well merited poems in the Kovai-style and recited them before Chera, Chola and Pandyan kings and before other affluent personalities. They are love poems that lead to God. He acquired thereby large wealth and spent all his money in building, temples and feeding devotees. So simple was his life and so sublime his service that God blessed his love with light and bliss and gave him a well merited place in His Kailas. Consecrate art and heart to God and that shall lead you to His Grace.

50. Nintra Seer Nedumara Nayanar

Let us now turn to the spiritual victory of Tiru-Jnana Sambandar at Madurai. The queen with the prime minister sponsored the mission and Sambandar's holy ashes cured the king's burning fever and converted him spontaneously into a Saiva. The king was then Kun-Pandyan, a hunch back. Jnanasambandar made him straight and he became majestic and magnanimous by the divine power of Sambandar. His name too changed as *Nintra Seer Nedumaran* - the tall king who has attained the lasting wealth of Divine Grace. His power and prowess enhanced.

The tall Pandyan of prosperous wealth and fame led his army and won the obstinate enemy at Nelveli. He marched to glory through a medley of political rivalry between the rulers of Ceylon, Kings of Chera, Chola and Pandyan countries and through the red rivalry of fighting creeds. He stemmed through storm and stress, the boat of national life and brought to his kingdom fame and felicitous glory. His service to God and mankind entitled him to the Divine Grace. He became an exemplar of spiritual nationalism and divine heroism. Religion and politics went together in the reformed life of Nintra Seer Nedumara Nayanar.

51. Voyilar Nayanar

Mylapore is a rich seaside town. It is a repertory of marine wealth. It measures with ships the treasure of seaborne trade. The rolling billows splash pearls and corals on its shores. The flags flying upon its white mansions embrace the moon which feels shy before the bright face of damsels, strolling on lofty terraces. Mylapore is an academy of Vedic scholars and learned poets. Its temples, rituals and festivals draw crowds and crowds.

In such a rich town, a poor silent man is sitting there in sequestered loneliness. He is a simple humble man of the ancient agricultural class. But he does not till the soil.

This poor man built a magnificent temple of golden tower and diamond pillars and rubied silver walls. It was illumined, with sun-like lamps. The worship was done with flowers rich in hue and scent. The Sanctum shone with a luminous Lingam adorned with gold and diamond jewels. The temple was filled with the fragrance of flowers and frank-incense and with humming hymns.

But how did he build such a rich temple and where did he build it? It is a temple of meditation built in the pure heart of the inner worshipper. Not even kings could afford to build such a rich temple.

Voyilar has no mouth to speak. He has only a heart to concentrate. The temple of his lonely imagina-

tion was built of serene love and sincere fervour. It was built not for the multitude but for silent solitude. There is no other priest for the temple except the pure mind. The puja went on continuously like the heart beat. Each breath was the flower of consecrated worship. Discrimination and self-reflection are lights in the Sanctum. Sekkizhar says:

"It was a mental temple built by ceaseless remembrance of God. The lamp of conscious communion shone in its Sanctum. Eternal bliss was the holy bath and pure love the offering to Siva in the Jiva. Heart's psychic awareness was Archana, strewing of blossoms. This life-long inner worship went on day and night and God was pleased with it and granted the Nayanar grace, peace and bliss." Saivism considers the universe as God's Temple and the heart of beings as its Sanctum.

The Cosmic Temple

Come into this Cosmic Temple
So grand, so pure, yet so simple.
The gemmed sky is its tower,
The World its image of Power.
Its God is the collective Soul.
Psychic Love its priest sublime.
Streams and winds sing a stirring hymn
To Him who is the Life of lives
By whose will everything moves.
Fresh blossoms are strewn by Nature
Offering ruby fruits mature.
The wedded delight self-to-Self
Is Riches, rare for royal pelf.
What is human ceremony
Before the dawn-lit symphony!

52. Munaiaduvar

Munai means battle-field. Aduvar means he who fights and kills enemies. Yes, Munai Aduvar was a lion in war fields. He was a mercenary soldier. He earned money by swordmanship and spent what he earned in charity. Nidur his village held him in awe and respect. The soil of Nidur was fragrant with its garden-honey. The streets of Nidur were sweet with the scent of delicious food daily distributed to the hungry poor. Sekkizhar sings: "The money which he got as a swordsman, he spent in charity to the devotees of Siva. He gave them rich feasts flowing with honey, milk, ghee, curds and fruit juice. This service was pleasing God and He raised his soul to the bliss of Sivalokam".

Earn to give liberally to God-lovers and the giving earns God's Grace.

53. Kazhar Chinga Nayanar

Kazharchingan is a heroic Pallava King. Kazhal means Anklet given for heroism. Chingam means lion. This king was a lion among heroes. He resisted all incursions of enemies from the North and saved his people from fear, evil and famine. He was an ardent devotee of Siva, Siva Bhaktas and Saivism. He worshipped daily in the temple. He went one day to the temple of Thyagaraja at Tiru-Arur. He was steeped in the worship of Siva in the Sanctum Sanctorum.

His queen went round the inner circle and was attracted by the fragrance of flower garlands there. She took a flower and smelt its fragrance. Alas! Sacrilege! Seru Tunai Nayanar, an orthodox devotee, saw that and got enraged! He took a knife and cut off the nose that smelt it. The queen swooned out of extreme pain. She fell like a tender flower-creeper schorched by summer fire. The king too came there after his worship in the Sanctum and enquired about the accident. Serutunai explained everything. She took and smelt the flower meant for God, and hence lost the nose. The king said, as she took the flower and then smelt it, I shall cut her hand too". Alas, alas! cried the temple goers! The king cut her hand too!

The king's fervour became proverbial. He would not admit or brook the least sacrilege in Siva Worship. Kith or kin, wife or sister his punishment was sure against any insult to orthodox form of ceremonial worship. Perhaps, God restored the hand and the nose to the penitent queen. The king reigned long keeping temporal and spiritual standards of discipline and attained God's Grace.

54. Idankazhi Nayanar

Idankazhi is a famous king of Konadu with his beautiful capital at Kodumpalur. It is he that covered the Ponnambalam at Chidambaram with gold. He was a staunch devotee of Nataraja Sivam and he liberally gave whatever God-lovers desired. He gave everything needed for the Thyagaraja Temple at Arur.

One day a Saint by name Sadaiyar was brought before him charged with theft in the granary of the king. The king saw the Saint keenly.

King : Why did you enter my granary?

Saint: O king, listen. I have the vow of feeding daily the devotees of Siva. Yesterday I could not get anything for my feeding charity. None helped me. Poor are your subjects. Hence I entered your granary to help those poor devotees.

King You have done the right thing. Why should I pile corns when my subjects starve? Behold my treasury here. You can take as much as you want for your charitable purpose. What is the good of heaping money when thousands are hungry?

The king opened his granary and treasury to the Saint. He took just enough for him and the king distributed his treasure among devotees. The devotees devoted themselves to God-worship free from the pinch of hunger. He attained the blessings of the Divine Grace.

55. Seruthunai Nayanar

We have already seen this Nayanar at Arur. He used to cut the nose of the queen who smelt the flower meant for God.

He was born at Tanjavur as a Saiva-Vellala and lived a pure life dedicated to the service of God and God-lovers. He had in his heart the feet that spurned Yama. He supervised the flower garland work. He took strong steps against any innovation. God showered His grace on him and the Saint lived, moved and had his being in God-consciousness.

56. Pugazh Tunai Nayanar

We have seen already how God gave two gold coins to Appar and Sambandar at Vizhimizhalai to feed devotees during a famine. God gave such a famine-relief-fund to another devotee also. He was Pugazh Tunaiyar of Seruviliputhur, a scholar in Vedas and Agamas. He was a soulful lover of Siva. He did Sivapuja with great interest. He would go without food but not without the worship of Siva. Rains failed and famine was terrible. Food became scarce. Pugazh Tunaiyar cared more for puja than for food. He controlled his hunger and continued his daily worship. He bathed the Lingam and adorned it with flowers and told his prayers regularly. He became weaker and weaker due to starvation. One day his emaciated hands could not lift the water pot for bathing the Lingam. He lifted it up which fell on the Lingam. He fell down swooned and then fell asleep.

God took pity on the Saint and said in his dream "Behold, I have left relief-money (Padikasu) on my altar. Take it and you will continue to find it daily until better days dawn. Feed yourself and my devotees".

God is the Father-Mother of fervent devotees. He comes to appease your hunger—hunger of the soul as well as that of the body.

The Nayanar carried on his worship care free, and attained Divine Bliss.

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57. Kotpuli Nayanar

Kotpuli, born at Nattiyattangudi in the Chola nadu, was a military man. He was the brave commander-in-chief of the Chola army. He bought paddy for all his income and distributed it to temples. He dedicated his possessions to Siva. He took delight in doing temple-charity that would bring felicity to his next birth. But his relatives were avaricious to misappropriate his stores.

Once Kotpuli had to go to a distant battle-field. He strictly ordered his relatives not to touch the grains stored for the temples and led his army to the field. It was a prolonged battle and the commander held the field for months together.

Famine affected the people. The relatives laid hands in the granary and emptied the paddy stored there into their stomachs. They thought of filling the granary after famine. This news stunned Kotpuli. He returned victoriously from the battle-field. The relatives warmly welcomed him. Kotpuli invited all into his hall promising rich presents, and therefore all the relatives gathered there. Kotpuli, became a puli (tiger). He reprimanded them for eating the grain dedicated to God. "You have stolen what belongs to Siva and Siva destroys you today" said he as he put to sword all his relatives that misappropriated his dedicated paddy.

God appeared on the scene and declared "Blessed hero Kotpuli, your sword has expiated the sin of these

miscreants who filled their bellies with the grains dedicated to my temple. Now I give salvation for all. Come you too to Sivaloka-"

Kotpuli enjoyed the bliss of heaven in the presence of Siva, the blissful.

St. Sundarar sings:—

> "Kith and kin I relinquished all and caught firm hold of The Truth that shines in the core of my heart. I emptied myself at the sweet lotus feet of my Saviour-Lord. I am nothing and He is all, All in all. I became His, His fortunate servant and attained the fortune of annuling rebirth."

"I know not what is at the head and what is in the middle. I know just this to take utter refuge at Thy feet. I am Thy slave forever, now, hereafter, in all my seven births. I am the slave of Thy slaves. This is my right to demand. Thee "O Lord, show me Thy luminous lotus feet at whose sight my heart shall melt."

58. Loving Servitors

It is a great achievement in human life to be the loving servitors of God. Such servitors have a melting heart of psychic love. They rejoice at the sight of devotees and follow them like a calf its mother cow and speak sweet, gentle words. They are supreme lovers of God who worship God and are delighted to see others worship God and look upon lovers of God with extreme affection and respect. Their life is an utter surrender to the Divine and a pure consecration to the service of His devotees....They never take rebirth in the womb. Their fame is greater than the world. Their evolutionary circle is perfectly finished. They know nothing equal to the love for God. They have no other thought except more and more love towards God. They talk and talk of God, shedding tears. They smear holy ashes and feel an ecstasy of joy-thrill. Standing, sitting, lying, walking, eating, sleeping, waking up, staring, winking, they never forget the lotus feet of Siva who dances in the wisdom Hall. They remember God with a single hearted love. All their love is engrossed in Siva. They work for him but are not attached to the fruit of their selfless service. Their mind is immersed in the thought of Siva who resides at Arur and they take delight in extolling His glory.

59. They Sing The Supreme

Let us sing the glory of those who sing the glory of Siva! He burnt the triple forts. He wore snakes as ornaments. He is the unique One that has become the many. He is not known by mind or senses. But He is omnipresent. He pervades all. The sweet Tamil and artful Sanskrit and other languages speak only of the Gracious Lord who dances in the heart of beings. Conscious hearts in tune with His love, sing of His glory alone.

Let Me Possess

Let me possess only Thee
To be possessed by Thee
Let my soul be always free
Like a Poet's reverie...
Let my life breathe in Thee
O Lord of my being
Let my hands work for Thee—
O Sun of my seeing
Let my mind think of Thee
And my heart be Thy love
Let my soul taste the honey
Of Thy Grace here and now.

60. Siva-Minded Sages

Sages that live in tune with the Infinite one go beyond the plane of sound. They attain Siva-consciousness by ingathered self-fixity. They realise the Cosmic Dancer in their heart and are His faithful servants and servants of His servants.

61. Those Born at Arur

How can a single tongue speak of the glory of the divine servitors that are born at Tiru Arur? It is the holy city of Him who is all, personal, impersonal, the Lord of Ema. They are the hosts of Supreme Siva who resides in the holy Kailas. Those who are born at Arur reach the highest plane of Divine Bliss. Their height can be reached only by sages who adore Siva's Saviour feet with self-gathered, concentrated devotion.

St. Sundarar sings with moving fervour:

"I am the servitor of all who take refuge in the Supreme Lord.

I am the servitor of servitors who sing the Grace of the unique One—

I am obliged to all who have their minds in the thought of Siva alone.

I am the humble servant of all who are born at the holy Arur.

I serve all those who adore God thrice a day.

I am the humble servant of sages whose whole body shines with holy ashes and of all lovers of God who shall hence take refuge at the feet of the Almighty Siva—I am the fervent servant of the Gracious Lord my Saviour Aruran at Arur—"

62. Thrice-Worshippers

Saivite Saints adore Siva thrice a day. They are always sweet and graceful. An aspirant with deep fervour must go to worship, pure and serene, after a clean bath. Those who have adored Him in the past, adore Him at present and shall adore him in the future, those who adore him in the heart are always great. Their greatness is beyond words. Siva is the inner meaning of the Veda. He is the Supreme-All; Let us adore the lotus feet of pious devotees who adore him thrice.

Glory to Thee, O God
O King of the universe
Descend with Thy synod
To change the world adverse.
Let Thy Truth shine ablaze
In the lamp of our life
Let all the human race
Follow Thee without strife.

63. Saints Wear Holy Ashes

Vibhuti or holy Ash gives all blessings. It is of three varieties. (1) Karpam, (2) Anu karpam and (3) Upakarpam.

(1) Collect the dung of very healthy cows muttering "Siva Siva". Dry it and treat it in the sacrificial fire—That Ash is Karpam.

(2) Collect the dry dung here and there. Knead it with cow's urine and dry it. Then treat it in the sacrificial fire—That Ash is Anukarpam.

(3) Collect ashes left in the forest fire, dung consumed by fire, ashes from the brick kilns, make them into lumps and treat them in fire—This is Upakarpam.

All these can be used. Don't smear ashes in the presence of Siva, before the fire or the guru; don't smear ashes while walking and while you are not pure. Take bath and then smear Vibhuti adoring the Master, pronouncing the Sivamantra. Vibhuti accords all wealth and prosperity.

Vibhuti can be smeared on the front. It can be donned, in three lines, like a crescent, in triangular form or circular form. Wear it with great love. Monks smear it all over the body.

64. Salutations to All Devotees

We have spoken about Saints in Chera Chola Pandya kingdoms. But Saints of all lands beyond the Tamil land, all over the world, Saints in the Periapuranam, Saints of past, present and future, Saints of all times, all climes, all races, all Saints adoring the Blissful Divine are to be saluted. All are one in God.

"What ever be the God men conceive as the Absolute, Siva with His Sakti comes as that God and blesses them all", proclaims Siddhiar, one of the main scriptures of Saivism.

65. Pusalar Nayanar

Pusalar born in Tirunintravur was a poor pious Vaidic Saint devoted to Siva. He was a savant of Agamas. He was sincerely devoted to the worship of Siva.

He aspired to raise a temple to the Lord whose ornaments are snakes. He could not collect donations. None came forward to give him even a brick.

He was resolved, like Voylar to build a fine temple in his pure heart. On an auspicious day he laid the foundation of faith in his heart. He followed the Agama rules to raise the superstructure. He raised walls, pillars, sanctum, terrace, tower, tank, well, garden, kitchen—everything was raised by the wealth of love and strength of faith. The temple was completed within and Pusalar chose a good day to install Lingam in the Sanctum—Sanctorum.

At the same time, the Pallava king Kadavarkone too raised a stone temple for Kailasanathar at Kanchipuram. The consecration and installation day coincided with that chosen by Pusalar. God came in the dream of the king and said "Postpone your temple function next day. Today I shall enter the temple raised by Saint Pusalar." The king was surprised. He went and searched and found out Pusalar and asked him "O Saint! where is your temple? God says: He will go to yours first and then to mine." The bewildered Saint Pusalar humbly replied: "Sir, my temple is perfect in my heart. It is not a material one. It is a psychic

temple." The king understood him. "Yours is the real temple," said he, saluting Pusalar. The Saint felt in his core, the presence of the Divine and felt the bliss all his life. The king saluting the Nayanar left the place. Next day the king celebrated the consecration festival in his stone temple. But he felt the True grandeur of the psychic temple of Pusalar.

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66. Mangaiyarkarasi

Mangaiyarkarasi, the queen of all womenfolk the paragon of feminine virtues, was the daughter of the Chola king, beautiful like Maha Lakshmi, the Goddess of red Lotus. She is our Divine Mother who fostered Saivam with the milk of gracious fervour. She removed the blot from the Pandyan race. It is she who brought Jnanasambandar to Madurai to rekindle the Light of Saivism and drive out alien darkness. It is she that propagated the ideal religion whose symbol is vibhuti—holy ashes.

Jnanasambandar himself sings about her : "Mangaiyarku Arasi, the queen of Pandyanadu, the progeny of Chola dynasty, godly woman of smiling coral lips and fishlike eyes—the gracious lady of Madurai, dedicated her life to spread the creed of Saivism. She revived the discipline of wearing holy ashes. She was helped by Kulachirai, the great Pandyan Minister, the large hearted patron of Saivism, the liberal host of Saiva Bhaktas. Alavoy, Madura is the magnificent city of Minakshi and Sundareswara and it is the happy city where live great souls like Mangaiyarkarasi and Kulachirai. Blessed be their name". Mother Mangaiyarkarasi deserved the eulogy of Jnanasambandar himself in his glorious hymns, how could I sing about her glory?"

"Mother, have faith. I am not a child. God's power is in me. The undivine forces shall not stand before the Divine Grace. Victory is for Siva." Thus

he encouraged the queen. It is the purity of her devotion which cured Kun Pandyan of his hunch back and made him Straight Nedumaran. The charming auspicious Arasi brought new light to the Pandya-nadu. Let us hail her, extole her and adore her! Hail Goddess of our Saiva race!

67. Nesa Nayanar

Nesa Nayanar was an expert weaver of Kampili in Bellary District which is a town of high mansions and men of high virtues. Our Nayanar was a sincere devotee of God, and a servant of His lovers. His thoughts were steeped in adoring the feet of Siva. He uttered the Namasivaya mantra always. His body was consecrated to the service of Siva Bhaktas.

He used to weave towels and cod-pieces and present them to needy persons. The service of clothing devotees went on unto the last until God took him into His Grace and made him ever blissful.

68. Kochengan Cholan

This red-eyed Chola king was a spider in his previous birth. How? Listen.

In the land cherished by the Cauveri, there was a tank called Chandra thirtham in a green forest. On its bank was a tall Jamboo (plum) tree in which several birds had their nests. A Sivalingam happened to be under this tree. A white elephant (Aanai) took interest in worshipping this Sivalingam. It bathed it with the water from the tank collected in its trunk and strew fragrant flowers upon it. Simultaneously a spider too adored the Lingam. Leaves from the tree were falling upon the Lingam. The spider wove a thick net above it to prevent the leaves from covering the Lingam. The elephant brushed it off and rushed for its worship. Everyday the elephant undid what the spider did laboriously. One day the spider lost its patience. It entered the trunk of the elephant and bit it severely several times. Unable to bear the pain the elephant cried aloud, fell down and struck the trunk forcibly upon the earth and died, killing the spider too at the same time.

By the Divine Grace the spider was reborn as the Chola king. Suba Deva the Chola king and Kamalavati his queen prayed Lord Nataraja at Chidambaram for an ideal child. By His Grace the queen became pregnant and the child was to be born. "Wait for one hour and you will get a child to rule over three worlds",

said the state astrologer. The queen requested to be kept head down for an hour and then got a splendid child with red eyes. It was the spider's reincarnation.

The mother exclaimed: "O, my red-eyed darling —King—Ko-chengannan" and expired. Suba Deva, the father brought up the child carefully. The child was precocious and pious, an ardent devotee of Siva, a hero, a scholar, a man of great wisdom. Suba Deva crowned Ko-chengannan in proper age, left his state-responsibility into his hands and repaired into a forest to do tapasya, for it was the ancient custom to begin life as a student, to enjoy life as a family man, then to retire for lonely life transferring the family responsibility to their progeny and end the life as a Yogin doing Tapasya.

Ko-chengannan had a nostalgia of his previous birth. He visited the same forest and found the same Lingam under the Jamboo tree and raised a fine temple there. He recognised the spiritual ardour of the elephant which worshipped the Lingam. He called the terrace temple as Tiru Anaikka Temple. Thus he perpetuated the memory of the elephant too and atoned for the sin of having bitten itto death. The kingbrought priests from Chidambaramto carry on worship at Jambu keswaram—which is oneof the famous Siva temples attracting thousands ofpilgrims every day. The king spent his days in protecting his people and in making them love Siva and servehis devotees. Siva showered His blessings on him.

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69. Nilakanta Yalpanar

Who accompanied the voice of Jnanasambanda in Yal, Vina ... ? We have already seen Nilakanta Yalpanar who did that melodious service all his life. Off with birth-low or high. Take note of his worth! He was born in a small village known by the long name Erukattampuliyur. He learnt Vina from an expert and became an expert in it. He did not commercialise his art and genius. He dedicated his skill in Vina to Lord Siva who was moved by the Vina of Ravana. He visited holy places in the Cholanadu with his Vina and came to Madurai. Perhaps he could not enter the temple. But he entered the heart of God by the melodious tunes played on his Vina strings. "Bring that Bhakta before my Sanctum; let him play here," spoke Siva to the priests. The priests saluted the lutist and brought him in with temple honours. The inspired artist thrilled the Sanctum with his celestial music. Siva and Shakti were so much pleased that a golden seat was offered to him and his Vina, by the Divine Grace. He followed in his Vina, the songs of Jnanasambandar and helped his victorious mission.

Panar went to Arur and the Lord opened a new gate for his entrance into His presence. The Divine Will directed him to Sirkazhi where he became the life long follower of Jnanasambanda who was thrilled by his excellent skill in playing Vina. The divine voice of Jnanasambanda was sweetened by the angelic stringed music of Panan. We have seen how the orthodox

Nila-Nakka Nayanar lodged him andhis wife near his holy Havan. Panar's wife too followedhim and her melodious voice added sweetness to the holy Thevaram conserts.

So sincere and so fervent was the consecration of Panar that he had the bliss of merging into the Divine Splendour at Nallur, during the wedding festival of Jnanasambandar.

70. Sadaya Nayanar

He was the fortunate father of St. Sundarar. The advent of Sundarar made an epoch in the annals of Saivism. He was the Comrade of God who stood by him in all his trials and treated him as a Divine prince. Sundarar had the bold intimacy of sending Siva to negotiate with Paravai. How fortunate was Sadaya in getting such a powerful son princely Divine! He was a vedic scholar of virtuous conduct and helping heart.

71. Isai Jnaniyar

She was the faithful wife of Sadaiyanar and the fortunate mother of Sundarar. She was an expert in music and it is her voice that sang in Sundarar. She was chaste, pure, devoted to her husband and God.

In chapter 74, we see how the son of Sadaiya Jnaniyar, immortalised himself in the history of Saivism.

72. Alala Sundarar

Kailas

The Himalayas are the lofty heights of peace and bliss where spiritual mysticism has its abode. The Ganges brings the secret message of these mystic heights to humanity. Mount Kailas is the sacred peak of the Himalayas where Siva and His celestial hosts have their abode. Its tranquil atmosphere hums with Vedic hymns, Aum of streams, and melodious songs of angelic voices mingling with stringed instruments. Sages meditate upon Siva. Poets sing his praise. Elements that hold the created world dance to the rhythm of their celestial harmony. The white snow silvers the sublime peak. Brahma's Swan sits there and he could not distinguish the white bird from the snow.

Upamanyu

Perfect sages meditate at the foot of the Kailas and around it. Upamanyu is their leading light. He is steeped in meditation on Siva whom he has enthroned in his heart. Siva appeased his thirst by giving him drink from the milk-sea. He is the son of Vyagrapada, the tiger-foot-sage who delights in hearing the jingle of Nataraja's creative Dance.

Upamanyu was one day holding holy discourses with sages when suddenly he perceived a divine splendour enveloping the atmosphere. Sages saw with wonder and a luminous Saint was coming towards them. Upamanyu saluted him. Who is this Saint of

light whom even the Master Sage Upamanyu salutes? The sages requested him to speak about the glory of that luminous Saint. Upamanyu spoke:

> "He is Nambi Arurar whom Siva treats as a friend. Listen to his mystic episode. He is Alala Sundarar, the close attendant of Siva in the Kailas. His duty was to bring, flowers and holy ashes to the Lord."

Love is Born

One day, Alala Sundarar went to the garden to bring flowers. Two angels were there gathering fragrant blossoms for the garland of Uma. They were Aninditai and Kamalini. Their lotus face and jasmine smile, their nimble lighting form and radiant beauty attracted Sundarar and they too were charmed by his winning personality. He loved them; they loved him. Eyes met eyes and hearts united. But they could not express their love. Love was lit in their heart.

Go to Tamilnadu

Siva knew it. He called the three souls and said; "Sundara, your heart loves these two angels–and they too love you. Go and be born a mortal in the holy Tamil Nadu to do my work and sing my glory. They too will meet you in two holy places." Sundarar was first puzzled and then said with tears in his eyes: "O Lord, I am afraid I may forget Thee due to human weakness. If at any time I forget Thee and do anything against Thy Will, please resist, reclaim and redeem me from evil ways, O Lord". "We will be watchful to do so, now, go," replied the Lord.

Holy Tamilnadu

Upamanyu continued "This is Alala Sundarar who returns from the Tamil Nadu after doing wonderful service to the Lord. The sages requested Upamanyu to speak about the glory of the Tamilnadu (South India) where Sundarar was born and where he did wonders by his songs.

Upamanyu spoke to them about Chidambaram where in the golden hall Nataraja held His Cosmic Dance. There is Tiru Arur another centre of spiritual dynamism. There is Kanchi where Uma worshipped Siva and revealed to the world thirty two varieties of virtuous acts. Tiruvaiyaru, Sirkazhi, Madurai and such holy places are in the Tamil Nadu and it is an adorable country. Alala Sundarar chose this holy land for his advent. He chose Arur as the centre of his mission.

The Sages then requested Upamanyu to give them an account of the deeds of Sundarar and the way in which he strengthened the position of Saivism. They requested Upamanyu to speak about Tiru Arur since Sundarar was named the Lord of that place.

73. The Glory Of Arur

Upamanyu gave an interesting account of Arur. Tiru-Arur is a beautiful town luminous with the presence of Laxmi or Kamala who adored Siva. Hence it is called Kamalalayam. It is noted for Vedic scholars, Saivite Saints and seer-poets. Chola kings ruled over it and they maintained peace and justice in the land. These Cholas were the progenies of Emperor Sibi who gave his flesh to save a dove from a vulture.

Anabaya Cholan

Anabaya Cholan was a famous Chola king who was the life of his subjects who loved him dearly. He was a devotee of Thyagaraja and supplied everything needed for the daily worship of the Lord according to the rules of Agamas. He was very careful about keeping his subjects, even cows and horses happy and free from the fear of thieves and miscreants. He was an able administrator, an impartial judge and he chose his ministers and officers carefully and directed them to do good to his people.

The Prince

By the Divine Grace a beautiful and dutiful son was born to him. He walked on the foot-steps of his father. He learnt quickly all arts and sciences. He was brave and adventurous. He was annointed as the crown-prince by his father and by the people. Vidi-

vidangan-that was his name, moved freely with the people to do good to them.

Car crushes Calf

One fine day Prince Vidividangan drove through the streets of Arur in a decorated car followed by friends and army chiefs. People were attracted by his royal dignity and tender sweetness with which he responded to their enthusiastic greetings. Everything was shining and smiling about him, when a miserable accident overclouded the scene of cheers and ovations. A tender calf jumped upon the moving wheels of the car and was crushed to death then and there.

The cow rings her grief

"Horror! horror; pity pity!!" cried the prince as he got down the car and saw the tender calf dying. He sought expiation from the sin. The mother cow came there, smelt its child, cried pitifully, shed tears of grief and ran to the palace. It rang her grief by shaking the Justicebell there with its horns and raised a pitiful cry. Hearing the bell, the king hurried up and learnt about the accident. The king ran to the spot and saw the calf. The cow too came there, crying with restless agony.

"Crush my Prince"

The prince was consulting priests about the ceremonial way of expiating the fatal sin. But the king stood firm on the point of suffering himself the grief of the mother cow.

"Let me lose my son in the same way as the cow. Let my prince be crushed in the same wheel of the

car. He called upon a minister to crush the prince under the car-wheel. The minister would not dare to do this hideous sin of killing the prince. He committed suicide. The king himself drove the car against the heart of his lovely prince.

"How aweful! Is there a king like him! He is Manu incarnate—" said the people as they stood stunned.

Siva saves all

But the Almighty Siva showered His Grace upon the king's rod of justice. By His Grace the calf stood alive, the prince was saved. He stood the test and God made him live again. God willed and the bodies killed, lived again. The cow shed milk for the calf. The prince wiped his tears and then fell at the feet of his royal father. The king ordered for a grand puja and feeding of Saints in the temple.

Such is the justice maintained by the Kings of Tiru Arur.

The Kamalalayam was the resort of all saints. They gathered in the Devasiriya Mantapam adjoining the temple. There saints were saluted by Sundarar in his famous Hymn of holy servitors (Tiru Tondar Tokai).

Now one such saint that often visited Arur was Sadaya Nayanar. He was praying God Siva for a divine child with his wife Isai Jnaniyar. These couples had their home at Tirunavalur. Let us go there now.

74. Sundaramurti Nayanar

Princely boy

Sundarar was born at *Navalur* in the Tirumunaipadinadu (S. Arcot Dist.) His parents were Adi Saivas. His father, as we have already seen, was Sadaiyanar, and his mother Isai-Jnaniar, both were devotees of Arur Thyagaraja. They named their pet child as Nambi Arurar. The child was so fair, so charming and so bright that every one was enamoured of it. One day the child was playing with a toy cart before his house. King Narasinga Munaiyar who was passing nearby, saw the charming child. His heart was attracted to him. He requested the parents to leave the child under his fostering care. The parents agreed. The king adopted the child as his own and brought him up in princely luxury and pious prosperity due to his ancestry. He was taught Vedas and Agamas. He looked a prince and lived a Sage. His mind was set in Siva. But he had not yet discovered the mission of his life when the parents tried to yoke him to wedlock.

Puttur wedlock

A girl was chosen for him at Puttur, the daughter of Sadangavi Sivacharya. Grand arrangements were made and the king contributed liberally for the marriage. Nambi Arurar came on a white horse followed by the elite of Navalur. The bridegroom and his party were received with bands and trumpets and fireworks at Put-

tur, where the function was to take place in the bride's house. Sundarar forgot his life-mission in the delusion of pomp and show around. Had he entered the family life with this delution, he would have just been a courtier of the king or a priest at home. God wanted to drag him from this delusion and awaken him to his divinity and holy mission. He stood an impediment to the marriage.

He is my slave

The bridegroom was dressed in shining silk and shimmering jewels. Pipes and drums and priestly chants, songs and perfumed showers of flowers rendered the place a heaven of tumultuous joy.

The bride's father lavished his wealth in luxurious feasts and displays which pleased the senses. The whole Puttur was drowned in a frenzy of frantic delight and who will remember God in this revel of joy-thrill? God alone remembered his duty to remind the bridegroom of his Godly purpose in life and intervened.

The bride and the groom stood there like Sun and Moon and their wedding was about to be solemnised; the auspicious hour was imminent. An old man interposed before the actual ceremony commenced.

The audience looked at him with surprise. The bridegroom noticed that aged man. His forehead was bright with holy ashes. His grey tuft was moon-bright. He was wearing rings in his ears and sacred beads on his body. He leaned upon a staff and spoke out: "Listen to me all of you and you Nambi Arurar - This marriage cannot go on. We have a dispute."

Nambi: Are you mad: what dispute? Explain.

Old man: Know all—this youth of Navalur is my slave—Some were angry; some called him mad. Some wanted to drive him away. But the bridegroom wanted to fight out his case.

Sundarar: I, an Anthanan, can't be a slave of another Anthanan. Are you insane? Where is the evidence? Whence are you, old man?

Old man: I am from Tiru Vennai Nallur. Call me sane or insane—Here is the deed executed by your grandfather. Herein is his pledge to serve me as my slave—himself and his progeny.

Sundarar: It is indeed a sham document, let me see—The old man higgled! Sundarar snatched it from his hands and tore it to pieces.

Sundarar loses his case

Old man: Let it go. It is only a copy. I have the original.

Sundarar: Show it here? Or come to Tiru Vennai Nallur before the village council.

Old man: I will show it to the wise council; come, follow me there.

Sundarar had a subtle love for the obstinate old man. Both of them put their suit before the Tiru Vennai Nallur Council of learned Brahmins.

Council: Bring proof-with documentary evidence.

Old man: Here is the document with his grand-father's signature. You can identify his writing.

Sundarar: It is all aged madness—How can this be?

Council: Let us see the document first. It is alright. "I, Aruran, an Adi-Saivite of Tiru Vennai Nallur, make this agreement with the "Mad man" who resides in Tiru Vennai Nallur—I and my posterity are his hereditary bondsmen, this is affirmed." The signature was proved true and the agreement genuine. Now, where do you come from?

Old man: From Tiru Vennai Nallur, my place. Here is my home.

Vision of Siva

Sundarar lost his case. Now all wanted to see the house of the old man. "Follow me," said he walking fast, faster, fastest—inside the temple Arul-Turai and disappeared into the Sanctum. Sundarar felt the descent of a sudden force. A splendour burst out before him and he had the immutable vision of Siva and Uma riding on a bull. Sundarar ran into ecstasy, saluted the Splendid vision. He now knew the Truth. He was a true slave of Siva in and out. Siva had come to possess his Jiva. He rushed into the temple crying, "Now I am Thy slave—O Lord, excuse my tuffness." The Lord addressed thus his Sundarar; "You are a tough devotee (Vantondar). I have saved you from bondage. Worship me by song offering." Sundarar again saluted the Lord saying "Salutions, O Saviour. How can I sing? How should I sing?" "You called me Pittan—mad man—begin with that word" said Siva. Sundarar sang:

"O Mad (after lovers) wearing a crescent, O Supreme, I think of Thee without fail. O Father with Shakti living in the temple of Grace at Vennai Nallur, I am Thine. Do not disown me. Thou art everything in me! Lead this servitor."

Yes, Siva who is mad after his lover, led him on through the changing avenues of dedicated life.

The bride proposed for him remained a pious virgin adoring Sundarar as God unto the last. She did not come on the way of his Godward march.

He sings onward

"Sing onward" was the Divine command. Sundarar went to holy places scattering blessings wherever he went. After singing at Tirutturaiyur, he crossed Pennai river and came to Tiru Adikai Virattanam where Tirunavukkarasu was reconverted to Saivism and where he did spade work. He would not plant his foot on the sacred place. He remained in Siddhavadin Mutt nearby. He slept there at night when God in the form of an old man planted his feet upon his head and said "Don't you know me?" Sundarar made a song offering and went to Chidambaram visiting holy places on the way.

At Chidambaram

He enjoyed the exuberance of verdant Nature on the way and reached the City of Nataraja vibrating with hymns and Vedic chants. His muse flew into high-pitched delight of ecstasy as he stood before Nataraja. The priests of Tillai gave him a rousing

welcome and Sundarar worshipped Nataraja again and again in the Sanctum. His eyes rained tears of joy. His mind had no other thought. His concentration was fixed on Nataraja. He imagined His cosmic dance in his heart and was transported to transcendent bliss : " Come to me at Arur," was the order of his Spiritual commander. Then he bathed in Kolladam river and reached Sirkazhi, the place sanctified by Sambandar. Sundarar would not tread the sacred soil but dedicated a song from the border of the town and saw in a vision the Father and Mother who gave the milk of wisdom to Jnanasambandar.

You are our comrade

At the approach of Tiru Arur, Sundarar felt a renaissance in his Spiritual Art. The Siva of Arur was the tutelary deity of Sundarar. He was grandly welcomed here. He entered the temple and stood before Thyagaraja. He offered to His Lord a melodious song " Here is the father who gave me salvation" sang he. The Divine voice spoke out then " You are our comrade. Live in our grace here as fair and felicitous as you were at Puthur on the day of your marriage." People called him God's companion from that day.

Love's eyes meet

One fair day as Sundarar entered the Sanctum for worship, his eyes were attracted by a virgin of buxom beauty, a celestial flower, radiating youthful lustre. Her eyes were darts of cupid. Her mien was virtue's model. Her tresses were like rain clouds. Her eyes were like lillies ; her face was like the spotless moon; her form was like a coral creeper. God of love lived in he

charm. A wonderful vision, a paragon of feminine beauty—Sundarar stood love-lorn and he had the nostalgia of that attractive angel whom he had met before in the garden of Kailas. Yes, she was Kamalini reborn for him in Kamalalayam. She now bore the name of Paravaiyar. Her bashful eyes feasted on his beauty. She mused " He—is he young Murugan or radiant cupid? Is he a celestial angel with a fragrant garland? Or is he a sage in whom the Grace of Siva has descended? I seem to have met him before: Who is this charming youth?"

Sundarar weds Paravai

They felt the inner flame. Hearts united; thoughts united; both of them sent their prayers towards Siva. Sundarar enquired about her and prayed God to negotiate their marriage, God Himself brought about their union. He directed the priests of Tiru Arur to celebrate grandly the marriage of Sundarar with Paravai. The wedding festival was delightful. Sundarar and Paravai lived a prosperous life of auspicious peace and contentment. God provided them with all their needs. What he desisted and annuled before, he fulfilled here. The 'no' and 'yes' of life go by His will.

Song of Divine Servants

Sundarar visited the temple daily and made his song offering. One day he saw Saints assembled in the Devasiriya mantapam. He prayed Siva to make him fit to live among those Saints. At first they thought he slighted them. Then they were pleased to know his humility. Then God Himself bade him and made him

sing the glory of the sixty-three Nayanmars. Sundarar prayed for inspiration and intuition. God gave him the first line "I am the servant of servants of the priests of Thillai. This long stirring Tiru tonda-thokai formed the source and spur to Sekkizhar's Periapuranam, the grand epic of Saivism.

God gives grains

God supplied the economic needs of Sundarar and Paravai through an old honest tiller of Kundaiyur. There was once famine in the country. Rice was scarce. The good old devotee took to prayer and fasting. God came in his dream and said "Behold heaps of grains before your home—for our Aruran."

He would not believe his eyes! Heaps and heaps of grains were there in the morning but how to take them to Sundarar at Arur? He again prayed to Sundarar and he prayed God. God ordered his heavenly messengers (Bhuta Ganas) to transport the paddy to Arur which was at once done. Not only Paravai's granary but every home of Arur was filled with grains.

Soul-nit love

Thus relief and redress sought Sundarar by God's grace so that he was above want and went on smoothly with his song offering. God was lavish indeed in his gifts to Sundarar. The readers must know that the relationship between Paravai and Sundarar was not libidinous. It was a pious psychic love - a love soul-soul-to-soul leading to the love of God in every soul.

Kotpuli

Kotpuli Nayanar of Nattiyattankudi who was enamoured of Sundarar offered his two lovely daughters Singadi and Vanappagai to Sundarar as his slaves. But Sundarar treated them as his daughters and gave them presents.

Bricks become gold

God gave his needs for he gave himself to God. Once Paravai was in need of gold to feed thousands of devotees and to hold holy concerts during the summer festival. She appealed to her Sire Sundarar and he appealed to Siva at Tiru Pugalur. Siva worked out a miracle. Sundarar took rest in a monastery nearby with bricks as his pillow. and lo, in the morning these clay bricks were turned into pure gold by the alchemy of the Divine Will. He then sang:

"O mind, do not flatter in vain the rich misers for gold. Sing the praise of Pugalur-Sivam and he shall grant food, raiment and all your needs! I think of Him all my life and adore Him daily!"

The Summer festival was very grandly celebrated with the gold granted by God.

Song Tours

Sundarar visited Nannilam, Vizhi Mizhalai, Vanjiyam, Idai-Marudur, Kudamooku, Valanchuzhi, Tiruvaiyaru and went to Mazhapadi where he sang a touching ode. God gave him Yoga and Bhoga, Self-bliss as well as enjoyments in life for He took upon Himself the

responsibilities of his life and its welfare. Miracles came on the way of this Divine help to create more faith in devotees.

The king of Uraiyur lost his ruby garland while bathing in the Cauveri. He prayed to God and it was found in the pot of water which bathed the Sivalingam at Tiru Anaika. The ruby garland was offered to Siva - Sundarar sings this miracle in a psalm. Nothing is lost when one consecrates it to God.

Visiting all the temples on the way, Sundarar reached Tirupachilachiramam where he sang and got plenty of gold for his expenses. At Panaiyur he saw the cosmic dance of Siva and sang "He is the beautiful Lord who dances on the stage of cosmic creation."

"O Lord of golden body, wearing tiger skin, in the loins and ebony flowers on the tuft, I meditated upon Thee. O King, O Gem, Diamond of Mazhapadi, whom shall I take as my Saviour except Thyself! Thou art my All"

To the God at Kodumudi he sang the famous Nama Sivaya hymn. "My tongue says unawares Namasivaya-even if I forget - It is in my mind above all thoughts" God led him personally and impersonally. Sundarar was going towards Viruddachalam avoiding Kudalaiyatrur.

God came in the form of an old man and directed him to the latter place. There he sang a fine decade meaning "I wonder how my Lord comes to direct my path to where He wants me to sing." Sundarar sang at Viruddhachalam supplicating for more gold. God granted him 1200 pieces of gold. God directed him to throw the

pieces into the river Manimuttaru and find them back at a certain spot in the Kamalalayam. He did find the gold when he returned to Tiruvarur after visiting Chidambaram. The gold reappeared first inferior then on further singing the same quality of gold was got and Paravai wondered.

The life of Sundarar was a continuous song offering, a pilgrimage and working of miracles mostly for his own advantage. He sang on the glory of previous Saints like Appar and Jnanasambandar. He adored the holy places where they manifested the glory of God to the world.

God gives food

After paying his homage to Jnanasambandar at Sirkazhi, Sundarar reached Kurukavur (Near Chingleput) in hot summer. He and his followers were worn out with hunger and thirst. An old sage suddenly appeared in a water shed with plenty of food. He sumptuously fed Sundarar and his group, gave them drinking water, spoke about Siva's glory. Sundarar had a nap and when he woke up, the sage was not there and the watershed disappeared. It was certainly an action of God's Grace. Sundarar adored at Tiru Kazhukkundram and came to Kachchur where he was tired and hungry. God in the form of an Anthanar, begged food in the hot sun from house to house and fed Sundarar and his group. O mercy, Thou art God! The Brahmin disappeared after feeding the Saint. Sundarar sang His compassion in a touching decade.

He was grandly welcomed at Kanchipuram with auspicious pots, lamps, incense, drums, trumpets and

music parties. He visited all the temples in Kanchi, Kalahasti and the surrounding places and reached Tiruvottriyur and here a new chapter opened in his life. This is the place where Anindidai reincarnated and took the name of Sangiliar the daughter of Jnayiru Kizhar, a rich agriculturist.

Marries Sangili

Sundarar was received very grandly at Tiruvottriyur. The town was beautifully decorated with arches and festoons; crowds of devoted men and women gathered with ocean-like ovations. The Saint lost himself in devotional fervour as he entered the grand temple of Thyagaraja and sang "This is holy Vottriyur hailed by ocean waves, rich in marine wealth. It has the grace and power to ward off evils from devotees who sing its praise."

Sangiliar who took birth by divine dispensation, grew into a bright fair angelic virgin. Her parents sought to give her in marriage to a proper youth. But she refused to marry any one except a Saint of Siva. She engaged herself in weaving garlands daily for the Lord in the temple. She lived alone in a Virgin-home. The parents looked upon her with awe and reverence. She was so pure. She was devoted to Uma Sivam and always thought of Him. She did the same flower service that she used to do in Kailas. One day her eyes met Sundarar as he was coming into the temple through the flower pavilion. Their hearts united and they loved each other as if they had already lived together.

Sundarar prayed God who was his comrade and confidant, to bring about his marriage with Sangiliar. God said, "Yes" and appeared in the dream of Sangiliar and informed her "My lover, my singer, my high and austere devotee, majestic like the Meru, Sundarar whom I possessed as my own at Nallur loves you and seeks your hands. Marry him and you will be happy" Sangiliar fell at the feet of Siva and said:

"O Lord, I am Thy servant. I obey Thy will. I would be his wife. But he now lives with Paravaiar at Arur. They delight in their conjugal life. If he swears that he would never desert me, I would consent to the marriage." Siva said, "Sundarar will give his promise not to leave you."

The Divine Master informed Sundarar about the condition of Sangili and the Saint readily agreed.

Both of them met in the temple early morning. Both came round the holy Magizha tree and took the eow of constancy. He vowed never to desert her. The vow was taken under the tree for God had been taken out of the shrine in the morning. It is also the secret desire of Sundarar that the vow should not bind him for ever. God intervened in their solemn affair and commanded his devotees to celebrate the marriage grandly and it was done so. Sundarar lived happily with his second wife at Tiruvottriyur. Their heart was one in love for God and in the song—offering.

Becomes blind

Sundarar often thought of the Lord of Arur and his wife Paravaiar. He wanted to be there for the

summer car festival. Paraviar danced in his mental vision. There was a strong inner urge to go to Arur. Hence one day he dedicated a song to God and crossed the bounds of Vottriyur when, alas, he lost his sight, for the sin of perjury.

"I come to you with an impure body. But nothing happens without Thy Will. Even if I slip on the spiritual path, I will fall only at Thy feet. I fall down with Thy name. I know nothing beyond that. It is yours to cure my ills and make me perfect in and out, O Lord of Ottriyur."

Thus he sang and struggled his way from temple to temple singing pathetic prayers. He crossed Tiru Mullai Voyil and sang at Tiru Venpakkam "O God in the temple, take pity on me—Remove my blindness—Guide me on. Art Thou—with me?" "We are—go forward? "The Lord said and gave him a walking stick: At Kanchi he sang "Pardon my faults, O Lord, and restore my sight" Siva took pity on his remorseful supplications and opened one eye.

He caught a disease which troubled him very much. He prayed for its cure at Tiru Turutti. He was directed by the Divine Will to bathe in the tank north of the temple; he bathed and the foul disease left him. He thanked God and went forward, and reached Tiru Arur. He felt a great relief. He was delighted to breathe the spiritual atmosphere of Arur. He entered the Devasiriamantapam to the joyful cheers of his lovers and reached the Sanctum and sang:

"I am Thy bond slave, O my Lord; I have no other desire besides Thy Grace. I am scorched in

heart by an agony which withers my being—Thy slave is burnt by misery. He cries for Thy mercy. Would you remain unmoved by his prayers? O God, is this Thy way of treating devotees?"

God out of compassion opened his other eye and Sundarar sang hymns of gratitude. He was now perfectly restored to health.

Paravaiar reconciled

The next hard task was how to appease Paravaiar who was too indignant even to allow messengers of Sundarar into her house. She thought he had betrayed her by marrying another lady. She was cross, sulky, proud and angry; she feigned utter dislike. Again Sundarar prayed God to intervene and Siva went to Paravai in the guise of a priest and pleaded with her. Her pouting pride and doubting mind persisted; Siva had to show His glorious form at last which dazzled her eyes and softened her heart. She fell at the feet of Siva and then received her Sire with love and reverence. Her home was radiant with a festive array and her heart was happy with blooming love. They lived again in peaceful harmony.

Kalikama's anger

Kalikama Nayanar of Mangalam was angry with Sundarar for employing Lord Siva as a pander, as a messenger to appease Paravaiyar. The very thought was a sin and sacrilege for him. To make the Supreme walk to a damsel, alas, what an abominable offence! Kalikama declared vengence against the Saint. Siva sent him a colic pain which could be removed only by

Sundarar. "No" Said Kalikama "that unworthy offender shall not approach me." Siva ordered Sundarar to go and cure Kalikama. But before Sundarar came, he stabbed himself to death. Sundarar hurried to the spot, drew the sword from his bowels and tried to cut his own head and end his life when God's Grace worked out a miracle to avert the tragedy. Kalikamar rose up and understood Sundarar's sincere surrender to Siva and the friendly relationship between his soul and its God. Kalikama thence became a devotee of Sundarar and helped his mission. Both visited Tiru Pungoor and other places and Sundarar stayed a few days under the hospitable roof of Kalikamar and then he followed Sundarar to Arur and was his guest for a few days. Kalikamar consecrated his last days to the service of God-lovers.

Cheraman Perumal

Another great friend of Sundarar was Cheraman Perumal otherwise called Perumakkodai. He was a Yogin who could read thoughts of even the animal world. His life was a dedication to Siva and he served Siva Bhaktas sincerely. He used to hear the tinkling anklets of Nataraja at the end of his morning Puja. One day it was delayed. The Chera became impatient and drew the dagger from his scabbard to commit suicide when he heard the anklets of Nataraja again and also a voice which informed him that God was listening to the Tamil song of Sundarar at Chidambaram, hence the delay. The Cheraman was delighted and he started at once to see Nataraja and Sundarar at Chidambaram. Cheraman sang there his Ponvannattu Andadi:

"His form is a golden splendour. His matted hair is like streaks of lightnings. He appears to me on the bull in the same manner as I meditate on Him.

"He is the Origin and Lord of the world. It is hard to describe Him though I see Him with my eyes and heart. Have love in heart, tears in eyes, smile on face, join palms, prostrate at His feet, sing His glory. He shall open the doors of His Heaven. He has given a mind to think, tongue to utter, a head to bow, hands to salute; He has given love to attract His Grace. Love Him, praise Him and be blessed, O mankind. Your life is wasted in sleep and sickness, in lust, fear, envy and in miseries of old age. Think of Him, speak of Him while yet health permits you." This is the prayer of Cheraman Perumal Nayanar. Nataraja sounded His graceful anklets and blessed him.

He then went to Arur to meet Sundarar who had just returned from his short tour. The Saint and the king, both poets, united in the soul and became fast friends. The unity of these dedicated souls had a magnanimity which was revealed in their words and deeds. They saluted and embraced each other. Both went to the Devasiriya Mantapam where Saints welcomed and hailed Sundarar as "A comfrere of Cheraman." Both worshipped Siva in the Sanctum. Cheraman dedicated a long poem to the Lord of Arur.

King and Saint

He was the honoured guest of Sundarar and Paravaiar gave him a regal treatment. There was feast for the tongue, ears, eyes and heart in that mansion where Sundarar lived with Paravai. Sundarar took

Cheraman to all important pilgrim centres of the Pandya and Chola lands.

They vistited Madurai; Vedaranyam, Pugalur, and all temples sung by Appar and Sambandar and made thrilling song offerings. They were guests of the Pandayan King at Madurai who arranged their long tour in his kingdom. They stayed a few days at Kutralam and bathed in the waterfalls. They visited Tirunelveli, TiruParan Kundram, TiruEdagam, Rameswaram, TiruKediswaram, Tiruchuli, Kaanapper, Punalvoyil and returned to Arur where Cheraman spent a few happy weeks of spiritual and aesthetic programmes.

Cheraman invited Sundarar to his capital and both of them started towards Kodumkolur visiting several holy centres on the way. They desired to visit Tiruvaiyaru but there was roaring flood in the river. Sundarar prayed to Siva and He led them across the Cauveri which divided itself on either side and gave a dry shod for them to march.

Royal Reception

Sundarar was received by Cheraman with royal pomp, display, flourish, parade and solemn state array. The streets were grandly decorated with flying colours and dashing, splashing, glittering exhibits. Both Nayanmars offered song-worship at Tiru Vanjai-Kalam temple. Sundarar's song described the splendour of Siva's majestic beauty. He was then seated on a state elephant. Cheraman seated himself behind him fanning him with yakchouri. People on both sides cheered them crying, "Siva Siva conquer Saivism! long live Nayanmars, long live Saintly friends. They are our

saviours, our light, our wealth, our strength, our leaders."

The procession stood now before the portico of the royal palace. The king humbly bowed at his feet and led St. Sambandar into the palace and seated him on his throne. There was loud flourish of musical voices and instruments. There were showers of flowers! Cheran washed Sundarar's feet in a golden plate and sprinkled the water on his head and on the heads of devotees assembled there. He applied sandal paste and kunkumam and did flower worship while Vaidics were chanting Vedas and devotees, Thevarams of Sundarar. He offered gold and silks. A rich feast was given and artful entertainments, concerts and dances were arranged. Sundarar enjoyed the royal treatments accorded by Cheraman Perumal.

Robbers

Sundarar took leave of Cheraman to Arur. Cheraman loaded him with rich presents and sent him on the state elephant with bodyguards. On the way near Muruganpundi, some hunters waylaid the party and plundered what they had. The presents made by the king were seized by these woods-men. Sundarar had no other recourse except prayers to Siva in the temple nearby. By the Divine power, the robbers were compelled to return the treasures. They piled them before the temple gate. Sundarar reached home with fabulous treasures and Paravai was all delightful. She received her lord with passionate affection.

Aspires liberation

Sundarar went to the temple. But his prayer now was not for wealth or personal gains. It was for libe-

ration for he remembered the cause of his advent and felt his work finished. He prayed Siva thus:

"O Lord, I will no more be a tenent of this mortal home built of bones and nerves. I am afraid I have lived beyond Thy will. ' Marry on" they say first and the body at last becomes a carrion. I loath this birth; I am afraid I have lived too long in this tabernacle. Death hounds birth in this miserable corporeal hut. Before death snatches me away, I have taken shelter at Thy feet. I am Thine - O Siva—I am not Sava (dead body)."

Resurrection

A call came again from Cheraman Perumal. Sundarar took leave of Arurar, Paravaiar and all devotees and went westward singing in temples on the way. He was passing through Tiru Pukkoliyur near Avinasi when he heard joyful hailings from a house and woeful wailings from another. On enquiry, a tale came out: Two boys, both of them being five years old, went together to take bath in a tank nearby. One was swallowed by a crocodile and the parents of that boy wept. The other boy escaped and his sacred thread ceremony took place with joy. The bereaved adored Sundarar. The Saint took them to the same tank and sang for the resurrection of the child:

"Supreme Lord of beings, I remember Thy Grace and live in tune with Thy Will. Thou art my Helper wherever I go. I pray Thee for liberation from any more birth. Thou art the origin and the end. Pray, order Kala (Death) to give back the child devoured by the crocodile in this tank."

Take me back o God !

God brought the life of the boy and it entered the body still growing in the stomach of the crocodile. The alligator left the boy on the shore and went into the water. The whole town hailed this resurrection as wonderful and worshipped Sundarar fervently. The news went far and wide. This resurgence was spoken with surprise in Kodumkolur too.

Sundarar was accorded there a princely welcome under the royal white umbrella. He lived in the palace but his thoughts went to Kailas. "Take me back, O Siva" was his prayer. One day he was worshipping in the Tiruvanjaikalam Temple. He deeply meditated and sang "O Lord, Saviour, I am disgusted with family life, life in this body. Grant me liberation. Call me back to Kailas." Sundarar was only eighteen years old then.

White Elephant

Siva heard his prayer and sent his hosts with a white elephant for Sundarar: The Temple was filled with luminous celestials. Sundarar mounted the white elephant. Just at that time Cheraman who finished his bath got the news and jumped upon his state horse. The divine elephant upon which Sundarar conveniently sat mounted up, flew in the air accompanied by celestials. Cheraman too breathed into his horse's ears "Namah Sivaya" mantra. It flew up and kept pace with the white elephant.

Reaches Kailas

They reached Kailas. Sundarar was admitted into Siva's presence. He sang in ecstasy "O Lord, I have come back by Thy Grace. I am grateful for Thy benign

guidance. Thou hast saved me many times from evil ways and proved to the world that Thy help is sure for those who take refuge at Thy feet. Salutations O Lord of Kailas!"

But Cheraman was still standing outside. Sundarar pleaded for him and Siva sent Nandi Deva to bring him in. Cheraman sang a Jnana Ula (A hymn of Divine Awareness). Siva willed that both should be among His hosts as their leaders and adore Him by songs and service. Paravai and Sangili too reached Kailas and assumed their flower service. They again became Kamalini and Aninditai. But now their heart was pure and luminous. Sundarar looked upon them as angels of purity and divinity.

Siva breathed in their soul and His love throbbed in their heart.

Sundarar was Siva's comrade; but Siva was always his Master; he was an eternal slave of the Master. He referred every happening of his life to Siva and invoked His aid where human strength was of no avail. God stood by his side for he stood at the feet of God. He sang 3,800 hymns but only a hundred are left to us.

We have written this short account of Sundarar's life from his own hymns which are replete with autobiographical hints. Sekkizhar has closely followed those hymns in his Account of Divine Servitors.

Love O Love, love the Lord!
Serve O serve, serve the Souls
Pray when the path is hard
The world moves on as he Wills.

Aum Sivam

APPENDIX

Compiled by

N. R. MURUGAVELL, M.A., M.O.L.,

Editor : Thirukoil

Adhanur : Birth-place of St. Nandhanar alias Thirunaalaippovaar. Now known as Adha Mangalam near Chidambaram.

Akkur : Birth-place of Sirappuli Nayanar. It is near Mayuram. The temple here is mentioned as 'Thanthondri Madam' by Sambandar, and Appar refers to God here as 'Thanthondriappar'.

Alagadhriputhur : This is now known as Alagaputhur. It is 4 miles South of Kumbakonam, associated with the life of Pugazh-Tunai Nayanar (Seruviliputtur).

Alankadu : Three miles from Tiruvalankadu Station near Madras. One of the five famous centres of Nataraja, adored as 'Rathna Sabhai'. Karaikkal Ammaiyar, after her return from Kailas, arrived here and spent the rest of her life singing His Glory and delighting in His cosmic dance.

Ambar : Near Mayuram. Kochenkat Chola Nayanar built a 'Madak Koil' here. Somasimara Nayanar performed a Vedic sacrifice here.

Anaikka : Birth-place of Kochengatchola Nayanar, near Thiruchirapalli. An elephant worshipped here and hence this name. This is the Appu Kshetra among the 'Pancha Bootha Kshetras' of Tamilnad. Water ever

oozes out from under the ground and encircles the Sivalinga in the sanctum.

Anjaikalam: This was the capital of the ancient Chera Kings, 4 miles from Irinjalakuda. It is mentioned also as Vanjikulam. It is from here that St. Sundarar and Cheraman Perumal flew to Kailas, mounting on the white elephant and a horse respectively.

Avaduthurai: This is the headquarters of the famous Thiruvavaduthurai Atheenam. Here Thirumula Nayanar, the author of the Thirumanthiram, attained superconscious trance under a Bothi. Sambandar got 1,000 gold pieces from Siva with a view to enabling his father continue his Vedic sacrifices.

Avinashi: One of the seven Saiva Kshetras of Kongunadu near Tiruppur. Here Sundarar performed the miracle of eliciting the dead-boy alive from the mouth of a cruel crocodile.

Chengattangudi: Birth-place of Siruthonda Nayanar. Six miles from Nannilam Station. The temple here goes by the name, Ganapatheeswaram.

Cheygnalur: Now known as Senganur. Birth-place of Sandeswara Nayanar, near Kumbakonam.

Chidambaram: Famous for its Nataraja temple. This is the spiritual capital of the Saivites. The Dikshitars or the holy priests of this temple are renowned as Thillai moovayiravar or Thillai Vazh Andanars. Poet Sekkizhar lived and wrote Periyapuranam here.

Einanur: Birth-place of Eanathinathar. This is on the southern bank of the river Arisil. Five miles South of Kumbakonam, now called as Enanalloor.

Emaperur: Birth-place of Naminanthi Adigal, near Tiruvarur now known as Thirumapattru.

Erukkathampuliyur: Birth-place of Tiruneelakanta Yazhpaanar. Now known as Rajendrapattinam, south of Vriddhachalam.

Ilayangudi: Birth-place of Maranayanar, in Ramnad District.

Irukkuvelur: Birth-place of Idankazhi Nayanar now called as Belur in Salem District.

Kalahasti: A place near Renigunta junction. This is one among the five sacred places (Panchabootha-Kshetras) and revered as Vayu and Visuddi Kshetra. Kannappanayanar attained his final bliss here.

Kanamangalam: Birth-place of Kutruva Nayanar, otherwise known as Kalappal, 2 miles from Thirukkalar on the south bank of river Mulli in the Thiruthuraipoondi taluk. This is different from Ponvilaintha Kalathoor near Chingleput District, Periya Kalanthai of Coimbatore District and also from another Kalanthi in Madurai District.

Kancharur: Birth-place of Manakkanchara Nayanar known as Anathandavapuram, alias Anantha Thandavapuram near Mayuram.

Karaikkal: Birth-place of Karaikkal Ammaiyar. A small sea-port in Thanjavoor District.

Karur: Birth-place of Eripatha Nayanar one of the Seven ancient sacred places of Kongunadu, on the bank of the river Amravathi.

Ketharam: This is one of the sacred places in North India, at the foot of the Himalayas. Situated at about 200 miles

from Haridwar and 146 miles from Rishikesh. Sanctified by a decad of Sambandar.

Kodunkolur: This is now known as Cranganore, famous for its Bhagavathi Temple. In ancient times, Thiruvanjaikalam and Kodunkolur remained together and formed parts of the same city. Cheraman Perumal had his capital here. Magothai is another name for Kodunkolur.

Kodumpalur: Birth-place of Idankazhi Nayanar. This was part of modern Pudukkottai region. The chieftains of 'Irukkuvelir' dynasty held this as their headquarters.

Kolakka: Here Sambandar got 'Golden Cymbals' from Siva. Hence the temple is called Thalamudaiyar Koil.

Kolili: Now known as Thirukuvalai, near Thiruvarur. Sundarar prayed Siva, and got all the mountain-like heaps of paddy, transmitted to the residence of Paravaiar at Tiruvarur.

Madurai: This was the ancient capital of the Pandyas. Famous for its Meenakshi temple. This is associated with the lives of Nintraseer Nedumarar, Mangaiyarkarasiyar, Kulachiraiyar and Murti Nayanar. The temple here, is referred to as Thiruvalavay.

Manamelkudi: Birth-place of Kulachirai Nayanar. It is in Aranthangi taluk.

Marugal: Near Nannilam in Tanjore. Sambandar cured and saved a merchant from snake-bite and thus helped him marry his fiancee.

Muthukundram: Now known as Vriddhachalam. The temple is sanctified by songs of Appar, Sambandar,

Sundarar and others. Siva granted 12,000 coins of gold here to Sundarar and helped him find them back in the Kamalalayam tank of Tiruvarur.

Nagapattinam: Birth-place of Adhipatha Nayanar. This is referred to also as Nagai. The temple here is reverentially mentioned as Nagaikaronam.

Nallurperumanam: Near Chidambaram. Also known as Achchalpuram; Here the marriage of Sambandar was celebrated and he attained his final beatitude with all those devotee-guests who had the good fortune of attending his marriage.

Nattiyathangudi: Birth-place of Kotpuli Nayanar. It is one mile west of Mavoor Road Station.

Navaloor: Birth-place of St. Sundarar, near Panruti. This flourished as the capital of Narasinga Munaiaraiyar, who adopted Sundarar as his own son and brought him up in his royal palace.

Nidur: Birth-place of Munai Aduvar, near Mayuram.

Pazhaiyarai: Birth-place of Amarnithi Nayanar. Capital of the Chola monarchs in the middle ages. It is near Kumbakonam.

Perumizhalai: Birth-place of Kurumba Nayanar. Since this was the capital of a region called Mizhalai Nadu, this is referred to as Perumizhalai. There were many places bearing the name of Mizhalai. To differentiate one from the other, they are referred to with attributes as Mizhalainattu-mizhalai. Venninattu-mizhalai, and Veezhimizhalai. This Perumizhalai is on the south bank of Vellaru, 4 miles from Thillaivilagam, in Tanjavur District.

Pidavur: This is now known as Thirupadaiyur; and also mentioned as Thirupathattur, 12 miles east of Thuraiyur in Trichy District. This is famous for its Iyyanar (Maha Sastha) temple. 'Thirukailaya Gnana Ula' of Cheraman Perumal was transmitted to this Iyyanar from Kailas, for publication and propagation in this world.

Ponmugali: The Sacred river that flows by the side of Kalahasti hills; otherwise known as 'Swarnamugi'. St. Kannappar waded through this river to have dharshan of Lord Kudumithevar, on the peak of Kalahasti hills.

Poompugar: Birth-place of Iyarpakai Nayanar, otherwise known as Kauveripumpattinam. This has been immortalised by the twin epics, Silappathikaram and Manimekalai. Saikkadu or Sayavanam is one mile west of this.

Poththappinadu: Now a small region in the taluk of Pullampet in the Cudappah District of Andhra Pradesh. Situated 15 miles from Rasampet in which lies Udupur where Kannappar lived.

Sangamangai: Near Kanchipuram, birth-place of Sakkiya Nayanar, who worshipped Siva in an eccentric manner by throwing stone at the Sivalinga everyday with unforgetful stead fastness and devotion.

Sathamangai: Birth-place of Thiruneelanakka Nayanar. South-east of Thiruchengattankudi, on the northern bank of Arisilaru. The temple of this place is famous as Ayayanthi, since Ayan (Brahma) worshipped Lord Siva here.

Senkundrur: Birth-place of Viralminda Nayanar. Now known as Senkannur and is south of Ernakulam.

Sirkazhi: Birth-place of Thirugnana Sambandar and Gananatha Nayanar, near Chidambaram.

Thanjai: Birth-place of Seruthunai Nayanar, a contemporary of Kazharchinga Nayanar and St. Sundarar. This is different from Thanjavur which was the famous capital of Rajaraja, the great. The former is Marugal Nattu Thanjai (Eastern Thanjavur) and the latter is Thanjai Nattu Thanjai. This exists south-east of Marugal and south of Thiruchengattankudi.

Thingalur: Birth-place of Appudhi Adikal, an ardent devotee of St. Appar. A small hamlet very near Thiruvaiyaru.

Thiruketheeswaram: Sivakshetra in Ceylon at about 20 miles from Talaimannar. This has been sanctified by a decad of St. Sundarar.

Thirukkadavur: Birth-place of Kungiliya Kalaiya Nayanar and Kari Nayanar. One of the "Ashta Veeratta Kshetras". Kalasamhara murthy and Abhirami Ambal are very famous in this shrine.

Thirukkovalur: The capital town of Meyporul Nayanar. An ancient city ruled over by Malayaman Thirumudikari, a celebrated chieftain of the Sangam age.

Thirukonamalai: This is one of the ancient Saivakshetras, in Ceylon, sanctified by the songs of Sambandar. Now mentioned as Trincomalee. This is a contonment-hill-town and also a sea-port.

Thirumangalam: Birth-place of Anayanayanar. Situated north of Tiruchirappalli.

Thirunintravur: Birth-place of Pusalar Nayanar who built temple for Siva in his heart. Now called as Thinnanur near Madras. Pusalar Nayanar is said to be a contemporary of Rajasimha Pallavar (666—705 A.D.)

Thirupadirippuliur: Now known as Cuddalore. Once it was a very famous Jain centre. St. Appar was floated ashore in the miraculous stone-boat and reached this sacred place. There still exists a place by name 'Karaiyeravitta Kuppam'. The name of the Lord here is Thontra Thunai Nathar (unseen helper).

Thirupananthal: This is the head-quarters of the famous Kasi Mutt founded by Kumara Kurupara Swamigal. 10 miles north-east of Kumbakonam. Kalaya Nayanar caused the Sivalingam of this temple assume its original straight pose by the power of his intense devotion.

Thirupuleeswaram: Kanampulla nayanar performed his lamp-lighting-service in this temple near Chidambaram.

Thiruperumangalam: Birth-place of Eyarkon Kalikkama Nayanar, near Chidambaram.

Thirupunkur: Three miles westward to Vaitheeswarankoil (Pullirukkuvelur). Herein is the temple where Siva commanded Nandhi to keep himself aside without hiding Him for giving Dharshan to St. Nandanar. This is connected also with the life of Eyarkon Kalikkama Nayanar.

Thiruthalaiyur: Birth-place of Rudrapasupathi Nayanar. Two miles from Kollumangudi, in the Mayuram-Peralam line. Ravana is said to have cut his head and performed homa here. Hence the name Thalaiyur and Homakulam.

Thiruvamur: Birth-place of St. Appar and his elder sister Thilagavathiyar. A small hamlet in South Arcot district, near Panruty.

Thiruvarur: One of the Chola capitals in olden days; famous for its Thyagarajaswamy temple. St. Sundarar's life is very much connected with this sacred place.

Thiruvathigai : Siva is said to have burnt up the Thirupura Asuras here. The temple is near Panruty. Thilagavathi Ammaiyar worshipped the Lord of this temple.

Thiruverkadu : Near Madras, birth-place of Murkha Nayanar.

Thiruvotriyur : Birth-Place of Kalikambanayanar, near Madras city. St. Sundarar stayed here for sometime and married Sangiliyar as his second wife, with the graceful help of Lord Siva.

Uduppur : Birth place of St. Kannappar now known as Udukkur, near Rasampet. This is at a distance of 40 miles to Thirukkalathi (Kalahasti).

Uraiyur : A Part of modern Tiruchirappalli town. One of the ancient capitals of Chola monarchs. Known also as Uranthai. Pugazhthunai nayanar had this as his capital. A temple here is sanctified by the hymns of Sambandar as Mookkeeswaram.

Varinjai : Birth-place of Satthi Nayanar, in the Nagappattinam taluk.

Vedaranyam : Near Point Calemere. Also known as Maraikkadu and Vedavanam. One of the Seven Vidangakhsetras. St. Appar and Sambandar opened and closed the Vedic door of this shrine respectively.

Veezhimilalai : Here Appar and Sambandar rendered famine relief service by receiving Padikkasu from Siva.

Vennainallur : Near Villupuram Junction. Here St. Sundarar was redeemed from wordly-clutches and had himself led into the life of service to Siva and sang his first decad.